Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter Worships Satan by BadHidingSpot, Deep_South

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Summary:

Steve takes the smallest of sips from the glass, swallowing slowly before he sets the glass to rest on his leg. “You wanted to know the reason right?” Dustin nods and Steve repeats the motion. “Ok then, well, you see, nothing comes from nothing. Everything is a trade, a deal. So take a guy like me, what do I want?” Steve pauses, breathes out a sigh that sounds almost wistful, like this is the first time he’s really thinking about all of this, even though Dustin knows that has to be a lie. But Steve just smiles, savors another sip. “I have all the material things a person could want. But let’s say I want more than that--”

“We sold our souls to the devil,” Billy cuts in.

Steve balls his hand into a fist, closes his eyes and snarls out a sound of frustration, like he doesn’t know if he’s angry or disappointed, “Fuck, Billy, I was trying to build a fucking moment.”

(Or: Just think Bonnie and Clyde, if they were, you know, two gay satanic teenagers who sold their souls to the devil to take down a clandestine government lab--that old chestnut).

1. Mark of The Beast

Author's Note:

The premise of this is heavily based on/inspired by the 2017 film The Babysitter, which we both highly recommend (currently available on most international Netflix platforms). The plot itself, however, diverges quite a bit from the film and remixes (i.e. fucks with) the Stranger Things timeline across all the seasons. Well, season One and Two at least. Season Three has no place here. (This is really also admittedly just some irreverent bonkers camp written entirely for sheer sexually morbid fun. So here's hoping there are those of you out there that enjoy that sort of thing...)

Also, our deepest apologies go out to the following:

-Satanists
-Catholics
-all the gods (+ Satan)
-people with morals
-people with ethics
-people from the lovely state of Indiana
-people from Queens, NY (And also Hell's Kitchen). (And Brooklyn).
-people who like Barb
-therapists
-sociopaths
-ladies and gentlemen of the cloth and clergy
-people who don't like puns
-Everybody else, probably

"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six."--REVELATION

13:16-18

"There is a beast in man that should be exercised, not exorcised." — Anton Szandor LaVey

1.1. THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Winter 1983 (6 days before Ascension)

Human skin will burn in under a second at 160 degrees Fahrenheit. Steve had never been one for books and science, but there were a few things that he has just picked up overtime—that basic everyday stuff of life—that had long-since become unavoidable. Common knowledge.

Skin burns at 160 degrees.

On average, a cigarette lighter built into a car's front bank burns hot at 1472 to 2192 ºF, depending on the model and the manufacture.

Added together, a fingertip pressed and held to the heated coils of an electric lighter will sear the skin in moments, the swirls of a fingerprint melting and scaring into something else. Smooth. Unidentifiable.

Steve's never measured the exact temperature of the lighter plugged into the Beemer's dash. Nor has he ever clocked the precise length of time the thing takes to heat back up between uses. Why would he? He isn't a man of science.

It doesn't really matter. It's 1983 after all, everyone living in the very future of modern science and technology and all that. The thing has a sensor. It will tell them when it's ready.

Steve takes another deep drag of smoke into his lungs as he waits for the Beemer's cigarette lighter to reheat to full capacity. The warm synthetic embers of the coil and the smell of burnt plastic are strangely at odds with the world outside the car's windows. There's no color to be seen for one, and it's freezing. It was only the precipice of December and the chill of the winter had already visibly taken up residency on the glass of the windshield, the whole thing delicately fissured with a coating of snowflakes and ice.

Steve watches another flake of snow collide softly with the glass where it starts to melt and then freezes. A broken drip. His own fingers feel frozen too, but Steve can't be sure if that's the cold of the car or the anticipation of what's about to come. He's excited for it, sure. He's waited too long not to be. But still, he's never been the masochist Billy was, and he really wasn't looking forward to dealing with the lingering scent of burnt flesh that was undoubtedly going to cling to the upholstery.

It wasn't the *most* enjoyable part of "The Plan," but they both knew there would be sacrifices.

Billy must be nervous too. He'd brought a whole bottle of Jack with him. Billy doesn't turn to whisky as often as he used to when he first came rolling into town. But then again, that was only a handful of months ago, really, and old habits die hard.

Steve watches Billy drain half the bottle, eyes tracking the way Billy's throat shutters in desperate swallows, before he pulls it away from him. "That's enough," Steve tells him, firm and resolute, as Billy wipes at his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Fuck you, *'it's enough'*," Billy bites back. "You're not even going first." He looks down petulantly at his own hands, like he's trying to take in the curves on his fingertips, commit to memory the arbitrary markers of an identity that he's never really cared all that strongly about before it disappears.

Steve shrugs. It wasn't like the order they went in mattered. Besides, Steve was definitely looking more forward to Billy's turn than his own. Concern for the leather interior aside, he could already smell that phantom burn of flesh in the air, even though they hadn't even started yet—the memory of the dark, sizzling scent still lingering in his sense memory from when he had given Billy his official brand the previous week.

It wasn't the memory of the scent itself that had Steve excited—it was all that it signified. All the memories that it conjured readily at the forefront of his mind. Because Steve could also still recall the look on Billy's face when Steve had done it, one steady palm curved around Billy's hip to help keep him down and still while he pressed the

molten twisted iron to Billy's inner thigh with the other. How Billy's mouth had opened, parted on a scream. How that scream had slipped right after into the sweetest moan. How Billy had *writhed* under the pain of it, a sheen of sweat breaking across his upper lip as his body arched and bent like it couldn't tell the difference between that and pleasure.

Billy had been *beautiful* like that, even more so than he usually was. A pure form of sweet perfection that Steve had never known possible. Certainly not from *Billy Hargrove*. But Billy really was perfect. A fallen kind of angel that Steve salivated for, always awed by Billy's ability to adapt and take, that awe turning into pure reverence as Billy endured the burn of The Brand to a point of extasy. How Billy's spine had arched as his skin sizzled, his whole body shivering despite the heat. How Steve hadn't been able to stop himself from reaching out to touch him, soothing the burn, just a little. Just a single slow swipe of his thumb against the crease of Billy's groin, utterly in awe as Billy had rolled his eyes back at the soft touch, shuddering as he *came*.

That in and of itself had been a kind of revelation. Logically, Steve knew that growing up as he had, Billy was used to feeling some of the sharper, crueler sides of hurt—that Billy had learned to endure it until he had grown so accustomed to the aches and stings that his body had learned to crave them.

But holy fuck had watching Billy come apart at the branding sear been a whole other level of bliss.

Steve had just smirked at him like he knew what Billy had been feeling. And Steve *did* know. He had the matching sigil already set deep into the front of his shoulder, right beneath the collar line of his Ralph Lauren polos.

And yet Billy had already known about that too—had been staring at Steve and his mark in the showers at school for weeks before he finally seemed to work up enough guts to approach him. His usual abrasive aggression momentarily suspended, hypnotized by the strange symbol on Steve's flesh as he finally asked Steve what it was, brazenly tracing the tips of his fingers over the violent, elegant angles. So Steve had shown him. And Billy had bowed to it—all of it

—thirsty for more.

So yeah, Steve doesn't buy it for a second that Billy is actually worried about the pain.

"I offered to go first," Steve reminds him, taking out the cigarette lighter from the dash, "I still can if you're scared."

Billy scowls, his hand scratching at the zipper of his jeans. "I'm not scared," he scoffs; like *this* would be the thing that finally scares him. To his credit, Billy doesn't actually look scared, and even if he is, the bulge forming behind the denim covering his crotch suggests it doesn't really matter either way. "I got it. Give me the light."

Steve smiles, encouraging, because this is the Billy he knows best. Fearless. An agent of chaos at whatever the cost. He puts his hand on Billy's chin, runs his thumb over his mouth. "You're gonna thank me, after," Steve promises, handing the car's cigarette lighter over.

Billy looks at the deep orange glow of the coiled metal; the light reflects off the whisky still coating his lips. Steve watches Billy watch the false simulation of a fire. It's a good look on him, the whiskey and the electric heat. Steve leans over the center divide to get closer to him, hand slithering into Billy's lap while he's at it so he can palm at the heavy bulge still tucked away between his thighs. But he keeps his eyes tilted upwards to Billy's face, for a moment at least. He wants to see.

Billy starts with his right hand, with the index finger. He goes for it quick and steady, pressing the pad of his first finger to the coils. For the barest moment there's nothing but silence surrounding the soft hiss of burning flesh between them before Billy reacts. Steve knows that despite Billy's thirst for shit like this, the burn has still gotta be *agony*, and while Billy doesn't scream, exactly, there is a strong noise of pain held tight in his mouth. Billy chokes on that sound, the faint lines around his eyes creasing as he clenches his jaw around it. Steve takes it all in—the slight tremble of Billy's spine, the beads of sweat on his brow, and the rapid twitch of his dick that's still managing to harden under Steve's hand.

Steve watches and feels proud of him. All things considered, Billy's

doing well.

“Yeah, that’s it, Hargrove. So fucking *good*,” Steve tells him. He knows, after all, how important praise and encouragement is in a time like this. Billy’s hips jerk up violently at the praise and Steve shoots him an encouraging and hungry smile, throws in a single steady rub with the heel of his palm as a reward.

Billy lives on affirmation. It’s one of the many things they both know, but never talk about: how a lifetime of nothing but cruel words and harsh contact has rendered Billy acutely susceptible to kindness and approval. They had collected plenty of their own crueler forms of contact together the first few times they had collided, mind-blowingly violent acts of sex and aggression, but then, a few weeks in, Steve had inadvertently discovered Billy’s kryptonite for kindness. Steve had started playing *nice* and Billy’s walls had melted. Not all the way, but enough to see through the cracks.

Steve’s mother always used to tell Steve when he was child, when he played with all the shiny new crystal and porcelain things in the stores she dragged him to on her shopping sprees in Chicago, that ‘you break it, you buy it.’ Steve was counting on that—had known that moment back in September when he first saw Billy step out in his heavy boots onto the high school pavement, wrapped in the promise of danger and destruction set to a soundtrack of heavy metal, that Steve wanted to possess him entirely: mind, body, and soul.

Steve runs a lazy finger up Billy’s fly, tracing the seam of it, “You getting hard for me, Hargrove?”

It’s an obvious question with an obvious response and Billy just moans, hitching up his hips. Steve tsks at him, “Nuh uh, I don’t think so. Use your words.”

“Fuck you,” Billy groans, growl in his throat as he goes for his middle finger. The skin sears and Billy’s hips buck under Steve’s palm.

Steve lets him this time, curls his hand into a fist so that Billy has the firm bridge of his knuckles to grind against for a moment. It’s not nearly enough stimulus for a guy like Billy, but Steve supposes Billy will figure that out soon enough.

“Fuck me, huh? You sure about that? That’s not how you usually like it.”

That growl in Billy’s chest settles lower, deeper. He really does have so much heat in him, a messy wild brush fire that makes Steve wonder how Billy managed to survive an upbringing raised in captivity and confinement. Billy glowers at him, licks across his lips, “Like you even care how I like it.”

It’s a lie and they both know it. Billy gets whiny sometimes when he’s horny. Bitter whenever he demands something that’s not automatically granted to him. Billy doesn't know how to trust someone enough yet to see it, but the thing is, Steve would give Billy *anything*. That’s part of what this whole thing was about. They had some hoops to jump through first, sure, but once the whole thing is finally finished, there really won’t be a single thing left that Steve can’t give him.

That doesn’t mean Steve can’t make Billy work for it though.

“Someone’s impatient,” Steve scolds him, just to hear Billy growl and whine again.

Other than the breathy pitch, Billy’s voice is far too level for someone currently in the process of frying off their fingertips. Steve can’t help but feel another surge of pride on Billy’s behalf. *Perfect.*

“Maybe that’s because someone else is refusing to suck me off.”

“I wasn’t aware I was refusing you anything,” Steve counters as he pulls his hand back, words contrary to his actions. “That what you want, Billy? You want me to *suck*?” Steve takes the hand that Billy’s been working on with the lighter, the first three tips of his fingers already rapidly reddening with the burn. Steve pours the whisky over them and Billy yelps, the sting and surprise caught in his throat as Steve pulls them to his mouth. The cheapness of the bottle makes the whisky taste sour as Steve begins to suck on the heat of Billy’s palms, cradling the length of Billy’s fingers with his tongue.

Billy squirms where he sits in his seat. Makes a heady noise of relief followed by yearning. And that’s once again the Billy Steve knows

well—a constant paradox.

“This what you want?” Steve asks, letting the tips of Billy’s finger poke at the back of his throat, swallowing until Billy can feel the flutter. Even though Steve knows it isn’t. Not exactly. But he also knows just how hard it will be for Billy to truly complain about having Steve’s mouth on him anywhere.

Sure enough, Billy’s eyes slit closed, “Christ, Harrington, your fucking *mouth*.”

Steve quirks a single brow at the expletive. He pulls back just enough to mumble with his mouth full of Billy’s fist, “Christ, huh?” Steve asks wryly as he smirks at him, swirling that wicked tongue of his around the words, tasting Billy’s knuckles, the nicotine there and the salt.

“You know what I mean, *come on*,” Billy urges with a push of his hips, “Come *on*, I want your mouth.” This time his voice comes out with a bit more of a whine than Billy had probably intended. Billy likes to be intimidating. He likes to think the world sees him as a living wrecking ball of anger not to be reckoned with. Steve thinks that’s pretty cute, utterly endearing, really, especially whenever Billy still tries to pull that bravado bullshit with him. But it’s not like Billy’s go-to affect of promised threats and violent menace actually works on Steve anyway, so Billy wisely doesn’t bother to self-correct the slip.

Steve runs his thumb over the length in Billy’s jeans. The fabric feels a little damp. He loves how hard Billy gets. How wet. “What’s the magic word?”

“*Steve*.” Exasperated. Petulant. Perfect.

“That’s the one,” Steve grants him, because he loves hearing the way Billy says his name when he’s bitchy and desperate. How he draws out the ‘e’. Loves making Billy say it.

He also loves the way that Billy looks when he’s wanting. Like he does now, face flushed with the heat his own body provides, a constant mortal inferno, sweat dampening the curls right at his

temples.

Billy wants a lot of things usually. Often all at once. Steve had been able to read it on him the moment he first looked into Billy's wild, returning stare—That life had already exacted a toll on him, leaving a flailing and desperate sort of soul. He had been drained to empty, running on fumes, every tense muscle and lock of his jaw screaming to be refilled. One look and Steve had just known that Billy was the kind of guy that needed to be filled again and again or else he'd disappear completely.

One look at Billy, the depths of his potential, and Steve had decided that he would always ultimately give Billy everything he needs. The strange thing though, is that Steve actually *wants* to give Billy things, more than he's ever wanted anything before. What's even stranger, is that Steve hadn't even simply purchased or just taken what he wanted with Billy, like he usually did. He had waited for Billy to offer it himself, to give himself to Steve, earned, eager, and willing. And Steve cherished that, cherished *Billy*, and his ever-hungry soul.

Not that Steve would ever tell Billy that. At least not directly. Billy was too stubborn to hear it anyway. Billy just isn't there yet— could never admit out loud how much his flavor of desperation isn't all that different from devotion. It doesn't matter though. There isn't a single fight or front of Billy's erected walls that Steve hasn't been able to subdue and crack. Billy will get there. Steve has the time.

Steve goes for the gapped fabric of Billy's jeans as Billy returns to his fingers. The jolt of the next touch of the lighter to skin pushes Billy's hips far enough up the seat that Steve manages to get the denim down around his knees.

The sigil on Billy's thigh is fully visible now, still swollen and angry as the brand tries to heal. It's Billy's fault, really. Steve keeps telling him that the sinfully tight pull of his jeans never lets the wound breathe.

Steve bends forward to press a soft kiss to the mark, tracing the raised skin with the outline of his lips. Billy's breath turns sharp at that as the rest of him goes soft, pliant under the barest touch. Billy's cock strains hard and wanting next to the outer slope of Steve's

cheek, high keens slipping from his throat that manage to hedge between anger and begging. But Steve ignores him in favor of mouthing at the mark instead, lavishing it with a filthy reverent sort of attention that leaves Billy quaking.

Above him, Billy moves on to the final finger on his first hand. With each digit, it's obvious from the way Billy squirms in the seat that the pain is becoming more familiar and it's easier for Billy to focus on the wet heat of Steve's tongue rather than the searing heat of his own fingers. Steve's mouth is skilled, always has been, but he's gotten even better with knowing Billy's body specifically, with knowing just what he likes and how. Like this, Billy's body is an open book. The soft pages of it spark and burn between them, heat rising until Steve feels like the one on fire is him. Like the burn has transferred through Billy to his own skin. The cavern of Steve's mouth is warm and wet, and it counteracts the dry burn until the tight stretch of his skin feels like a natural extension of the moment, like Billy's entire nervous system is on fire anyway, so what's one more thing. It certainly makes things easier. And, besides, Steve knows Billy's hands—how the thumb should be by far the easiest to do as it is. Years of friction between the pad of his thumb and his zippo has already built up a fair bit of calloused scar tissue and the suction of Steve's lips turns the flash of bright pain into something sweet, forcing the vowels of Billy's swallowed scream into a low moan.

Steve chuckles into Billy's skin, still sucking at the sigil, tongue lapping at the joint crease of Billy's thigh to his groin, the vibrations of the deep laugh fluttering through his throat.

Billy's hips jerk up under him as he groans. "Yeah--fuck, Harrington. You're such a fucking *tease*," Billy mumbles, gravely and breathless, as he finishes off his right hand. Once his right thumb is done, Billy puts his hand into the bucket of ice they brought. He puts the lighter back into the port to charge and uses his un-burnt hand to clutch at Steve's head, curling his fingers in his hair.

The wild tangle of Steve's locks must be soft beneath the tips of his skin. And Steve wonders if Billy is maybe trying to memorize the feeling, unsure of how long it will take for his fingers to heal enough to regain sensation in his hands. But that in and of itself will be a certain kind of final hurdle to be savored. It will, after all, be the last

time Billy will ever need to heal.

Billy had been understandably hesitant at first when Steve had pitched him The Plan. But Steve knew that a guy like Billy would be quick to see the ultimate advantages. That he would ultimately go along with whatever Steve deemed best.

This is exactly why Steve's in charge.

Steve removes his mouth with a final wet kiss to the brand. Sitting up, he ignores Billy's whine of protest as he takes Billy's hand out of the ice and examines the work. The melt of the ice washes away the top layer of charred skin, the tips that come back up are raw and twisted with white. He nods his approval. "Good job," he says, kissing each tip. "Good *boy*," he adds, and Billy jerks his hips again, chasing the affirmation.

Steve reaches over Billy's knee and pulls the lighter back out of the port, it glows orange with the full charge and he presses the handle into the now blank fingertips of Billy's right hand. "Now finish the left one and I'll finish you," Steve says, coaxing and convincing. There's less resistance in him now that Billy knows what it feels like, what to expect. Now that the pain is something he's adapted to.

True to his word, the moment Billy takes the heated coil back from him, Steve dives his head back down. He rolls his tongue in circles over Billy's head, slides the tip into the slit, and then flicks his way all the way down the length of him until he once again reaches thigh. Billy comprehends the trajectory after a delayed beat, at the precise moment that Steve's lips find The Mark, sealing around it and sucking deep. "Fuck, *STEVE*," Billy shouts, eyes sliding back up into his skull at the pulling sensation against his saphenous. Steve can feel the vein kick beneath his teeth.

That sizzle is back from somewhere above Steve's head and the scent of scorched flesh fills the front of the car. Steve looks up, eyes locking on Billy's as Billy works. Steve worries a bruise into the skin pinched between his teeth and he waits. Billy takes in the wet gleam of Steve's lips around his skin. His cock throbs in the air between them. They both know how much Billy *aches* to slide inside Steve's mouth, but Steve had made his parameters on that crystal fucking clear.

It's the best sort of motivation. Billy rushes through the rest of his fingers, burning each tip of his left hand without really thinking about it. Steve's eyes light up at the acceleration and Billy just groans back, "You're fucking *evil*, Harrington."

Steve's eyes get even brighter; he grins around his mouthful of Billy's skin. "Am I?" Steve gets out, running his tongue over the old burn, sweet and curious, like he already knows the answer. Because he does. "You say the sweetest things, baby."

"*Fuck*, ok, it's done. I'm done!" Billy flashes his fingers, waving them in front of Steve's face so he can see them. The grin Steve gives him in return is blinding. Billy waits for Steve to say something more, but before he can even inhale, Steve lunges forward to take Billy's dick all the way, finally and entirely, into his mouth, opening his throat up wide and loose so that it just slides right in past the point of gagging—not that Steve even can gag anymore, the muscle far too used to the familiar pressure.

Steve knows just what it does to Billy to see the golden boy of Hawkins High sunk down on his knees. Even modified like they are, Steve bent over the center console of the car, just the view of Steve's jaw stretched around him will be enough to set Billy off.

Sure enough, Billy moans low at the deep slide of his cock against Steve's lips. The burnt nerves in his fingers tingle in rapid-fire pings up his forearms. The sensation must be too much, prohibiting him from grabbing onto Steve's hair again like he wants to. He can't grab onto anything really; he has to either keep his hands suspended or bury them back in the ice. He goes for the later and groans again. Steve would like to think his mouth gets all the credit for that, but he knows Billy likes the pain just as much, stuffed full of too many frayed and crossed-wires from a childhood of adrenaline and violence. He knows Billy's whole body must be *singing*.

The less responsible part of Steve wants to take advantage of that, of Billy, spread out tense and needing across the front seat of the car. But Steve also knows he needs to make quick work of this because they still have to do his own hands. They need to make sure Billy is home before he's missed. If Neil beats him to death for breaking curfew then all of this was for nothing.

Steve doubles his efforts as Billy runs his fingers over the nape of Steve's neck. Steve can feel it, how the touch is smooth, smoother than any touch should be. Billy's fingertips glide and Steve can feel his own dick twitch in his Docks. He glances up and sees Billy watching him desperately. Billy's done well. Steve's oddly proud of him even though he's never actually doubted Billy's ability to see this whole thing through. Steve knows that when the time comes, Billy will do it. That he's *The One*. With his eyes, Steve tries to communicate what he's thinking, but then Billy probably already knows. Steve already said it moments ago, but then Billy loves to hear it multiple times.

Steve unlocks his jaw from around Billy's cock to slide up his torso, bringing his mouth to Billy's ear instead to whisper it to him, "Such a *good boy*, aren't you, Hargrove? So fucking good—*for me* .

The heady sound Billy makes in response is the kind that deserves a reward, and Steve gives him one, wrapping his hand around his dick and taking in the hitch in Billy's throat again at the praise. This will be the last time Billy will feel the identifying ridges of Steve's fingers on his skin, and there's something a little sick and pleasurable in that thought. Billy must think so too because he can't seem to take his eyes off Steve's hand as he shudders, little whimpers skipping through his tongue as his orgasm spills over Steve's fingers.

"That's it, yeah, Hargrove, come on," Steve coaxes as Billy shakes, comes all over Steve's fist, his mark, and the bruised imprints of Steve's teeth. Steve swirls his fingers into the mess on Billy's thighs, really rubs it into the tips, wondering if this part of Billy will melt into his skin when it's his turn to burn.

Billy slumps forward, body hard and heavy where it leans into Steve's. Knowing without question that Steve will just catch him. That Steve's frame can support his. Billy looks spent, but satiated, elated, and, yeah, Steve thinks, Billy will do it. Steve knows he will, but he tells Billy again anyway, his teeth pressed against Billy's throat as Billy's heart rate comes back down.

"You're really going to do it, aren't you?" It isn't a question so Steve answers for him, "Yeah, you will—*We* will. And it's going to be good. You'll see. You're perfect. He's going to love you. And you're gonna

love it. The things we'll do together. The power you'll have. Can't wait to see you like that. It's gonna be so beautiful, and I know you're going to be so *good*."

Steve can just see it, the image already vivid in his mind of how Billy will look, radiant and otherworldly.

He's waited so long for this.

It had been almost nine years to the day since Steve had been that little boy that once got lost in the woods. The one that had come upon a concrete fortress of power and light in the heart of the forest and seen things that no little boy should see. Nine slow years of thinly reined in patience. Nine years of knowing the things that he does. The things that men *do* to one another in the name of science, curiosity, and lust. The monsters that roam through the world without rhyme or reason from a very different kind of hell. Nine years of knowing all the things he does while being so *alone.* And now there were just six days. Six days and he'll finally get to do it, complete the ritual and gain everything he needs to set the world free.

And he'll have Billy Hargrove by his side.

Steve holds out his hand to Billy for the lighter. Billy just holds it firm for him instead as he pants in breaths, the coiled flame upturned and waiting like some sort of offering on an altar so that Steve only has to press down to take what he needs. Because, yeah, Billy is *perfect*—angry, and loyal, and so fucking beautiful. Steve can't help it then, when the initial zing of the first burn sings through him, he crushes his mouth to Billy's, feels the soft whine and yield of Billy's lips open for him, pressing back.

Billy is a rebel, a hellion, a fighter. And yet, Billy really is so good to him—so good *for* him. And that deserves every kind of reward.

"Six days," Steve murmurs into the opening of his mouth, over and over until Billy is groaning deep in his chest like he always does when Steve assures him, "We're gonna do it, Billy. You'll see. You and Me. And it's gonna be so so good."

2. Genesis of Kings

Notes for the Chapter:

> SO we realized some stuff that becomes more apparent later might actually be helpful contextual information to have from the beginning, which is that this story is an AU that takes place in a remixed and inverted season One and Two world in which the Hargrove/Mayfield family arrived in Hawkins as they do in S2, ****BUT NONE OF THE UPSIDE DOWN STUFF IN SEASON ONE HAS HAPPENED YET.** *** Steve is Dustin's babysitter, and The Hawkins Lab is still out there doing their thing, but Will has never gone missing, and none of them (other than Steve and Billy) have seen any otherworldly or supernatural shit go down… yet.
>
> That being said, here's a quick chapter update-- a bit of a quick foundational flashback, as it were.
>
> (Thanks to everyone who have left comments and kudos so far. We dearly appreciate you. <3)

"We are each our own devil, and we make this world our hell." —Oscar Wilde

2.1. A Genesis of Kings

Steve first met the devil when he was nine. It had been a stupid game of truth or dare, childish really, driven by that childhood naïveté about mortality and how the world really worked. There was a power plant behind Steve's house. Something electrical and boring, but it always loomed among the weeds like a beacon and Tommy had dared Steve to sneak past the guards and go inside it. Looking back, an older Steve might have realized that power plants don't generally need to be overseen by militia. But Steve at nine wasn't older, he was reckless, looking for attention under a facade of being brave. So he had gone. And he had seen.

The plant wasn't a plant after all, at least not one that provided services to the city. It did deal in power though, the menacing kind. The kind that came from darkness and exerted itself over others, *exploitational*, bending bodies to their will. Bodies of people—of children; each tied down and strapped in to all sorts of wires and machines that made all kinds of otherworldly sounds. Steve can still remember the girl in a yellow dress, floating horizontal over the metal slab of a table. She was dead, but she was screaming, mouth slack and wailing.

Steve had seen and he had run, tripping over his feet and tripping off alarms. There had been the sound of boots behind him, echoing down the hall in sharp clacks in rows of twos. Even at nine, Steve knew that if those sounds caught up to him, he'd end up just like that girl, turned into a slab of meat with a mechanical scream.

Somehow Steve had made it to the forest, dizzy with adrenaline and fear. The woods were closing in, some swirling gas of color and light filling his panting lungs. Steve wasn't fully sure yet what death was, but he knew it was coming for him. He didn't want to die, and he says so, out loud to the forest. And that was when Steve saw him—The Devil—sinuous and bright against the trees.

And Steve had felt comfort, overwhelming and pure. The *thing* before him, a presence old and deep in the guise of a man, was no threat to Steve. Not like the men chasing him through the woods were, or the monsters that trailed behind them like trained demonic mutts.

The Devil had been kind, patient and understanding, as Steve had caught his breath. And Steve had pointed back towards the concrete structure marring the weeds and told him what he'd seen. The Devil had listened, and then he had helped, had given Steve all the words he needed to be brave. The Devil had asked Steve what he wanted and Steve had told him: *to live*. Not for himself, but for the children in those rooms, the ones lonely and scared. He wanted—needed— to help the ones that couldn't help themselves.

The Devil had smiled, soothing and calm, and then they had made a deal.

Steve had seen The Devil at nine. He thought he'd seen hell, had run

out of that lab with hellhounds on his trail only to run into something else. The thing is, is that The Devil didn't make men do anything, just gave them the means. And the lab, the lab wasn't The Devil's work at all. They had managed to set up and run that operation all by themselves. The lab had gone looking for power, had sliced open worlds to find it, and they had found some. Only what they had found were pale imitations of the kind of shadows that were now a part of Steve's soul. The gaping maw of torn time and space, the heart of some deep madness that dwelled within those walls, couldn't even come close to matching the darker primordial power that pulsed through Steve's veins. Even if it was a dormant power, Steve could still feel it, simmering in wait and all his if and when he wanted to fully unlock it at eighteen. The Devil didn't take children, but it still made Steve feel braver, secure and protected by his mark that lingered under his skin like a promise.

Steve knew he had to wait and bide his time. That there were horrible things that men could do to children, and that Steve had been *chosen* that day by the Devil himself, a protector of all the young that couldn't save themselves. The day would come in December, in the year 1983, like it was written in the stars. Steve would turn eighteen and the world would be his. Back then That Day was still nine years away, but even Steve as a child had learned how to be patient. It had been hard earned by the years of waiting: waiting for his parents to come home, waiting for them to notice him, for them to care. Steve could wait for this too, and he would. In nine years the world would be his. Steve Harrington, the protector of youth, of all children: lost, hurt, and scared. He would take the world for the children and he would give it back to them. Make them all safe.

Steve Harrington had first met the Devil at nine and he had made a deal. One he didn't regret.

**

Billy first met the devil when he was four. He had pale blue eyes and a voice that didn't even waiver when he yanked Billy so hard up off the ground that it broke his arm. Placing the pendant around his neck, his mother had told him all about "the devil": how angels and saints hovered in the clouds to protect him from the hurt and pain

that the devil could do. But then she had left him, left him with the devil, and Billy's world still had been nothing but hurt and pain. It didn't take long for Billy to stop believing in angels, if he ever really had. Billy grew, molded by that hurt and pain, seeking brief reprieves at the back of his closet or under his bed. Monotonous years of fear and forced submission came and went and nothing ever swooped down from the sky to protect him.

Until Steve.

Billy had never imagined that he would find absolution in Hawkins, Indiana. But there Steve had been. Deceptively soft and painfully pretty, but with that unbreakable center of steel and safety. Steve made Billy believe that angels could be real. Not the kind his mother used to speak of, but *better*. Better like *Steve*, a dark angel truly worth bowing for. Steve who saw him—who *saved* him.

Billy was seventeen when he first truly met The Devil, on a morning in late September when Steve's mouth had met his. Steve's tongue had burned like a fire, seared his insides until Billy felt clean. Billy had known then that there was something about Steve that made him different—that made him *better*. That Steve had a certain power in him that flickered beneath his skin like a flame. One that transformed Steve from just another cocky teenager into a confident King.

Billy had been drawn to that fire the moment he first saw him, the midwestern pale of his slender fingers cradling the even paler paper of a cigarette to his lips, his body tilted casually against the slope of his car, hair styled high and his sunglasses pulled low. Steve had been just another student in the highschool parking lot—or he should have been. But ordinary students didn't have the confidence that Steve had. The charisma. The charm. Popularity was one thing, but Steve was something else. He was the kind of crowned golden boy to which the whole student body bowed.

Billy had sensed the fire in Steve, had looked into Steve's eyes and craved the heat. But Billy hadn't truly understood the full extent of Steve's inferno until the second of November, on the day that Steve had finally fully seen everything that Billy really was for the first time too—all of him—cracked and exposed after a run in with his father. It had all been something small and stupid (a forgotten cup in

the sink). The glass had shattered against his temple when Neil had thrown it, leaving Billy with micro shards embedded in his skin.

That night in November, Billy had crawled to Steve, too tired to fight and weighed down with wounds Billy just couldn't fix or hide on his own. And Steve had been different—*kinder*—as he had mended them, licked up the blood and split Billy open in ways entirely new. And Billy had learned then that the devil he knew wasn't The Devil at all, just a man who had bent and broken Billy so many times that Billy couldn't see past him.

Steve told Billy about the difference between demons and The Devil, about how Steve had once looked into the heart of darkness and the Devil was now inside Steve's very soul for a purpose such as this: To protect children like Billy, kids who only knew fear and pain. Steve promised to save him. To keep Billy *safe*. And for the first time, looking into the opal clear eyes of Steve Harrington's righteous gaze, Billy *believed*.

Billy kept his mother's pendent as a reminder that angels came in the strangest of places. They weren't holy, ethereal, and impotent like the tableaus at Sunday services. They were dark and powerful and seductive.

They were Steve.

3. Like a Camaro Out of Hell

Notes for the Chapter:

> If anyone is curious about The Babysitter movie this is in part inspired by, the trailer is here: THE BABYSITTER TRAILER . (This fic doesn't follow the PLOT of that movie, really. More some of the vibes, tone, and a couple of select scenes. But it's a bonkers fun time and worth a watch. Also the Babysitter and the kid have some major Steve and Dustin energy. And there's another dude who is lowkey psychotic and inexplicably never wears a shirt. Which, Billy. :P)

"... The devil doesn't come dressed in a red cape and pointy horns. He comes as everything you've ever wished for."— Tucker Max

3.1 LIKE A CAMARO OUT OF HELL

Winter 1983: (Five days before Ascension)

The Monday before Mrs. Henderson's cat breeding conference feels like it's going to be the longest week of Dustin's life. He thinks it's inhumane to make a school week five days. He says as much to Lucas when he steps out onto the porch to wait for their ride.

"It's only five days. I heard that Catholic kids like *live* at the school and it's just year round. They don't even get summer breaks," Lucas says, calm, casual, and not nearly as outraged by that kind of information as Dustin thinks he should be.

Dustin blinks back at him in horror and instantly regrets it. The weather had been growing steadily colder and the winds sweeping up the driveway made his eyes hurt. He probably should have brought his mittens, but he's too excited by the prospect of debating with Lucas to go back for them now. "Who do *you* know that's Catholic?" Dustin retorts, because, *come on*, what kind of argument is that?

"Max says Billy's mom was Catholic," Lucas informs him without

even looking at him, because Lucas has a new backpack on today that he's fixated on instead: he keeps glancing behind them to see its dull reflection in Dustin's porch window.

Dustin fidgets on the top step, suddenly a little sad about his own worn out bag. His mom had offered to buy him a new one at the start of the school year, but this one had his Pac-Man patch on it so he'd passed. But now he wonders if he can maybe just cut it off and sew it to a new bag like Lucas's.

"Okay that's like five separations of information." Dustin thinks for a moment, trying to remember what he's heard about the kids in plaid pants and skirts that have to drive an extra thirty minutes every morning to get to school. From his understanding, very few just start going to public their junior year. "Did Billy go to Catholic school?"

Lucas doesn't give any time to the question before he's shaking his head, "I don't think they'd let him in."

Dustin snickers as another thought comes to him. "If you and Max got married, he'd be your brother-in-law."

"Shut up," Lucas grimaces, elbowing Dustin in the ribs. "What about Steve? He's probably Catholic right? His parents are rich."

Dustin's *pretty sure* that link can't be exclusively true, so he rolls his eyes. "Not all Catholics are rich." Steve *is* rich though and he always has the best stuff. Dustin should really see if Steve will take him shopping for a new backpack this weekend.

"But like, most of them are." Lucas leans forward, looking down the road, as if that's going to make their ride appear any faster. "So I guess you're really excited about this weekend?"

Dustin beams, the gap in his teeth dominating his smile. "Hell yeah! Forty-eight hours, just me, Steve, pizza, and his pool. He says we're gonna rent a bunch of movies too and watch them on his big screen in the den. He's gonna get The Shining. We're gonna stay up all night."

"Yeah right," Lucas snorts, "you'll be passed out before ten."

It's definitely a concern. Dustin knows Steve stays up later than he usually does. But Dustin's been practicing staying up late for two whole weeks now--ever since his mom had told him about the cat conference and how he'd be staying at Steve's house for a whole weekend. "I will not. I'll have coffee or something."

"Steve is not going to give you coffee so you stay up all night. Steve probably *wants* you to fall asleep by ten."

"No way, Steve likes spending time with me," Dustin leans back on his elbows, "We're buds."

"Buds or not, you're twelve and he's like almost eighteen."

Dustin isn't sure why Lucas is telling him this. He knows how old he is. That isn't exactly new information or anything. "What's that got to do with anything?"

Lucas looks kind of incredulous. Like he doesn't think Dustin and Steve can be friends, which is just dumb. Steve totally helped him pick out new sneakers last week. Steve had even bought Dustin a milkshake after and told Dustin everything he knows about how to be sure you're picking out the right pair of sneakers depending on the outfit. Steve knows *a lot* about sneakers.

Lucas waves his fingers in Dustin's face. "Hello? That's basically an *adult*. Plus, he's like the number one school stud. He's probably planning on having a girl or two over after you go to sleep."

"Or two?" Dustin furrows his brow. "What would he do with two?"

Lucas scoffs, like he knows so much more about this than Dustin, but Dustin can tell he doesn't. "It's like, you know, the same you'd do with one but like extra?"

Dustin barks out laughter, brays it like a donkey. "You don't have any idea!"

"Neither do you," Lucas gives him a friendly shove, "I'll bet you Steve Harrington does that kind of thing all the time. I bet he has, like, multiple girls over at once. He probably has orgies all the time."

Dustin rolls his eyes again harder. Steve is cool; He definitely has better things to do than hang out with a bunch of girls. “Whatever,” he counters, “Spell ‘orgy’.”

Before Lucas can, and for the record he definitely can (it’s only a four letter word), the loud scream of rock music and tires screeching into the Henderson’s driveway interrupts them. The boys go stiff, tense, because the car is not the trusty BMW of Steve Harrington, one that Dustin has practiced driving in a couple of times, but instead the ominous blue Camaro of Billy Hargrove.

The glass of the car window begins to crank down, and Dustin’s seen enough movies to know that this is how they die. They’re both holding their breath until Steve leans out of the now open passenger side window, sunglasses on and a big smile, and he waves them over.

The chill in the air is brittle enough that Dustin doesn’t hesitate any further, all cares as to why Steve is in Billy’s car forgotten in favor of pulling at the door on the side closer to Steve. Lucas approaches the car with more hesitation than Dustin. The sight of Steve instills trust in Dustin, but Lucas will never be fully relaxed near a psycho like Billy Hargrove.

Billy Hargrove who is driving in aviators and smoking. His shirt is halfway unbuttoned, but he’s wearing heavy leather gloves. It’s like his hands are cold but his chest is warm: Who does that? The gloves are nice, high quality, so they must be Steve’s. Steve uses one of his own gloved hands to turn down the music. Billy doesn’t even flinch. Dustin does note that Steve’s gloves are newer, so maybe he bought new gloves and tossed his old ones to Billy.

It takes Dustin longer than it should to figure out the handle on the car’s door. But the metal is cold and so are his fingers. Steve is the one to open it for him, stepping out of the car and popping up the seat so that Dustin has room to climb in. “Hey, Dusty,” Steve beams as he exits, giving a fist bump to his young charge. He looks at Lucas and the smile doesn’t fade, “Sinclaire, new backpack? Looks sharp.”

Lucas smiles and brandishes the backpack which is, in fact, new, and it’s pretty cool that Steve Harrington noticed.

Steve's smile grows brighter as he stretches tall on the driveway. His leather gloved hand reaching up to smooth out some crick in his neck causes the bottom hem of his shirt to ride up with it. Billy's eyes are quick to follow. His glasses are tinted, but even through the shade, Billy's stare is sharp and Dustin, about to climb into the car, pauses, suddenly once more unsure as to why Billy is even there.

"Lucas?" Max says from the back seat before she's pulling off her seat belt and leaning into the front.

"Sit the fuck down," Billy grumbles around the cigarette. He's halfhearted with it, bored or distracted with his eyes still fixed outside the car on Steve, so she just ignores him.

"Morning, Max," Lucas says, pushing Dustin aside a little to get closer to the window. Her hair is so long that it pools a little over the armrest in the car. Max Mayfield is the only being on earth that can make Lucas get physically closer to Billy Hargrove. "Did you see my backpack?"

Steve seems to finally notice that Billy Hargrove is staring at him. Steve mouths something to Billy that Dustin doesn't quite see. Whatever it is, it makes Billy's eyes widen then slit as his tongue rolls over his teeth.

"Get in the fucking car, Henderson." Billy still doesn't change the direction of his gaze but he actually does raise his voice now. "We don't have all goddamn day."

Dustin huffs, not looking forward to pushing himself through the narrow gap between the passenger seat and the back. Muscle cars really were dumb. And impractical. "What are you doing here anyway?" Dustin asks with annoyance.

Steve runs one of his gloved hands through his hair, artfully tossing a few strands to the side, eyes locking on Billy's, and Dustin notices how Billy shifts awkwardly in his seat like he suddenly can't sit still. Dustin hopes it's a stomachache. "My car is in the shop. Billy's being nice."

Max rolls her eyes. "Like he even knows how."

“Excuse you miss priss?” Billy snaps. “You want to fucking walk to school?”

“Get in,” Steve says, nodding his head to the back seat. “You too, Sinclaire. Stylish kid like you shouldn’t take the bus.”

“What?” Billy targets his clear annoyance at Steve who doesn’t even flinch. Just keeps that golden boy smile on his face which makes Billy scrunch up his in anger. “No fucking way, Harrington. I’m not a goddamn shuttle service. I said you and Henderson-” But Lucas is already climbing into the back behind Dustin while Max scoots aside to make room for them. They even have their seatbelts on before Steve climbs back in himself and responds.

“Your car holds five, Billy,” Steve’s voice is still upbeat. Dustin isn’t sure how he can have such levity when fighting with Billy Hargrove, but Steve actually almost seems ecstatic by the prospect. “So it’s not a problem.”

Billy’s nostrils flare and he sucks down the last of the cigarette. They must be locking eyes, staring each other down, but Dustin can’t really see for sure through their shades at this angle. He can tell, however, that Billy is the first to break eye contact, tossing the used butt out the window and peeling out of the driveway with a scowl.

Steve just chuckles, unfazed and delighted by the win. “Buckle up,” Steve calls into the back. He reaches forward and turns the music back up.

*

They’re about fifteen minutes earlier than usual because Billy speeds even when he doesn’t need to. Possibly so he can scare the kids in the back. When they get to the school and all pile out, Billy lights another cigarette and hands Max her lunch box that she almost left in the back seat.

“3:30 sharp and don’t be late,” He says.

“We’ve got AV Club today,” Dustin says. Steve raises his eyebrows.

“When does AV Club let out?”

“Five,” Dustin looks a little sheepish, but Steve nods like he understands. If Steve were driving this wouldn’t be an issue, but Billy is another matter. Billy wasn’t exactly *great* with kids.

Steve calls back to Billy without turning from Dustin, “Let’s put it off until after five, Hargrove.”

Billy doesn’t argue. He grimaces, sure, makes a face to make sure they all know how displeased he is by this, inconvenienced, but he doesn’t argue. “You’re lucky you’re pretty, Harrington, otherwise someone might say ‘no’ to you and break your heart.” Billy turns to Max. “You going to AV Club, too?”

“I wanted to,” she seems a little unsure and she looks at Steve as if she knows that, with his support, she can do what she wants without Billy breaking her shit.

Steve looks utterly unfazed by the new projection of the day as he shrugs. Dustin finds himself mimicking the movement on instinct, just to see if he can get his shoulders to move as causal and cool as Steve’s. “She should,” Steve affirms, like it’s already settled. “More girls should do AV Club right? Nancy’s always on about that.”

“Oh and we should all fall over ourselves to do what Nancy Tight Ass Wheeler says,” Billy punctuates this with a cloud of smoke. If Dustin were just ten percent less scared of Billy he’d defend Nancy’s honor, but as it stands, he just rolls his eyes.

Dustin starts walking backwards, waves his hand to say bye then stops and asks, “Oh wait, Steve?”

“Yeah?” Steve hadn’t started to turn away yet, he prefers to watch and make sure the kids get into school and out of the lot okay.

“Are you Catholic?”

Billy snorts so hard at that question he coughs on his cigarette smoke.

“Uh,” Steve smiles, confused by the question, “No. We’re Protestant. Why?”

“Just wondering.” Dustin shrugs. He can’t seem to get the movement

right. Not like Steve can. But he probably just needs some practice. “How’s that like, different from Catholic?”

Steve offers that smooth rise of his shoulder again, gloved hands patting at the pockets of his tailored pants. “We only go to church on Christmas and we care *way* less. Like about everything. There’s no confession either.”

“If anyone needs to go to confession, it’s you,” Billy snickers, suddenly out of the car and *there*, his own gloved fingers plucking a pack of smokes out of his own front pocket.

“I’ll see you at five, Dusty.” It’s a dismissal but not a mean one. Steve ruffles Dustin’s hair, high fives both Max and Lucas, and ushers them off. Billy comes to stand next to him, hands him a cigarette and lights it.

“Your fucking charity work drives me up the wall.”

“You could learn a thing or two from me,” Steve looks at Billy, lets the tinted shades of his glasses slide down the bridge of his nose and winks. “I’m the most trusted babysitter in town.”

Billy snorts; he will never understand why Steve cares about kids the way he does. “Everything set for Friday?” Billy asks instead, voice dropping to a whisper that’s more sensual than serious, like the plans get his blood boiling.

“I need you to work Barb,” Steve says, volume equally low.

Billy’s lips turn down at the corners in a way that Steve can’t help but classify as a pout, even though Billy would keel over and die if Steve were to tell him that. It’s cute though. Breathtaking, really. “Me? Why can’t you?”

“I tried, but she thinks it’d be a betrayal to Nancy.”

Billy rolls his eyes. The sour expression on his face is one that he often sports whenever he hears that particular name. “Jesus. I never thought I’d see the day. A pair of panties that Steve Harrington can’t drop.”

“I’m sure you’ll do just fine, big guy.” Steve exhales smoke between them. Billy’s tongue darts out. He licks his grin, stepping a little closer into Steve’s space.

“You know I get all tingly when you delegate tasks, Steven,” he teases.

Steve presses in tighter, closing the sliver of air that Billy had left between them, hand coming up to fist at Billy’s collar so that to anyone else passing by it will look like a fight. But he lets Billy feel his smile, pressing his lips to the base of Billy’s ear, gets his voice deep into his chest so that his next words come out like a secret that only Billy can hear: “Yeah, I know.”

Billy affirms Steve’s words with a moan, a shiver sparking up his spine. Steve loves it every time, the way the prickly hard shell of Billy’s body can just surrender.

There’s the clatter of another body hitting the bike racks in the distance. Steve pulls away from Billy and his eyes narrow when he sees those little shit birds, Troy and James, standing over Dustin chanting some middle school insult. Steve flicks the cigarette away and stands tall, pausing a moment to absorb the sting the action pulls out of his fingertips, still charred and healing beneath the leather.

“You can leave it,” Billy suggests, but he knows it’s useless.

Sure enough, Steve suddenly only has eyes for the kids in distress. “Work Barb,” Steve orders from over his shoulder and Billy audibly sighs, exasperated. “And don’t come on too strong,” Steve adds, even though it’s futile. Billy only ever has one speed: *full throttle*. But there’s no time to retort. One of the kids is yelling something back at one of the school yard bullies and Steve is already making his way quickly across the lot to the bike rack. Billy rolls his eyes and puts his own smoke out, flexing his own palms a few times to keep his fingers limber, before he heads into the high school, ready to find Barb and offer to help her carry her books.

Steve doesn’t even pause to watch Billy go. He doesn’t have to. Billy isn’t the one he needs to worry about right now. With the right motivation, Billy is actually great at doing what he’s told.

Steve's legs have always been longer than necessary and he makes it to the bikes before any of the action really gets going. One of the newcomers looming over Dustin raises his hand to strike, but Steve is already there. He catches his arm on the upswing and twists. The kid's wrist buckles easily, as does the kid himself. Steve stands over them glowering, the sun hitting him just right on his Wayfarers to make him hedge more menacing than cool. Except to Dustin, who always thinks Steve looks cool.

"My arm," James whines. The little boy sings out several "ows" and although Steve keeps the pressure on all the right points, he doesn't push hard enough to break.

Even though he'd really like to.

"Did I hurt you?" Steve asks, curious. Of course these two little assholes were the kind that could dish out pain but not take an ounce of it themselves. It certainly isn't a surprise--common even. But that doesn't mean that it also isn't still a little disappointing. "Sorry. Accident."

"What?" James wriggles in his hold as he looks around, possibly for an adult, but of course there aren't any. He had made sure of that before he shoved Dustin and called Lucas a name that had Max lunging at him. Mike had to hold her back.

"You sure?" Steve twists a little harder in a move both careful and calculated. It didn't take much pressure to get a guy to bend. The human wrist really was conveniently frail. "See from what I can tell, what I did just now, grabbing you a little too hard, that was an accident. What you did, shoving Dustin, that was on purpose."

"He tried to trip Mike too," Will pipes up and Steve flashes the young Byers a smile to thank him for being so helpful.

"Now that's no good," Steve sighs. "You left handed? I hope so. You should really put some ice on this when you get home. The scaphoid is such a delicate bone."

"Please don't break my arm," James looks like he's going to cry.

“Steve you don’t have to-” Dustin starts but Steve holds his free hand up. He leans in close, studying the kid and the bent angle of his elbow from the hold. He looks scared but not repentant. Like the moment Steve isn’t around he would still happily stir up shit again.

“You thought no one would see you, didn’t you? You thought you’d shove my friends around here and get away with it, right?” Steve brings him in closer and stares him down. Steve knows exactly what he’s looking into. The kid is an empty kind of soul. Not your average playground bully, but a child who was never anything but a dull void. But even blossoming psychopaths still have a sense of self preservation.

“I’m always watching,” Steve warns him, “And next time I catch you even *looking* at my friends here? I won’t do anything.”

James swallows. He definitely is going to cry. “You won’t?”

“Not right away,” Steve smiles, the same smile he gives Dustin’s mom when she pays him, or Karen when she sends him home with leftovers. The moms love that smile, makes them feel so appreciated and trusting, but there’s nothing inside James to charm, which means that to James it’s the scariest smile he’s ever seen. “You still live off Oak right? And your Dad works late Wednesdays?” James glances around like the kids he was just bullying are going to help him. “Next time you do this shit I’m going to sneak into your house and make you eat your own tongue.” And it’s so lighthearted, the way Steve says it, but his eyes dance almost like it’s the truth. Dustin (aside from James) is the only one who considers that it’s just an empty threat.

“I’m sorry,” James stutters. Steve lets go. The kid stumbles a bit at the release and Steve smooths out the wrinkle in his shirt. Troy scurries forward to pull James along and Steve shoots a cold, steady smile at Troy as they walk away. Just to remind him that he’s on the list too, in case he thought the threat was only for James.

The air around the remains of the group feels cold, the snow from yesterday still stuck in clumped patches on the pavement. Max is still shaking but it's in that higher tempo tremble of anger rather than fear. The others are all murmuring in exaggerated whispers, eyes all

still on the bullies' retreat. All except Will, who turns to Steve, his big deep eyes solemn and curious.

Steve knows that Troy and James certainly aren't the biggest threats out there, but he'll still need to keep an eye on them. He's learned the hard way that true evil can lurk in the strangest places. For the moment though, the kids are all fine, and that's what matters.

“Go to school,” Steve says waving at the party, “go learn something.”

Dustin beams, he’s the only one that does. Will is still just looking, same curious assessment in his eyes, where the others have already moved on to making sure Lucas’s new bag survived the confrontation. With the bag deemed unscathed, Dustin beams brighter. He calls out, “Thanks Steve!” Because he really is grateful and he really thinks that Steve didn’t mean that whole ‘tongue eating’ thing. Like, how would that even work anyway?

But the thing is, Steve Harrington’s thought enough about it to know.

4. The Left-Hand HandJob

"The right-hand path and the left-hand path have traditionally had the same end goal; it is only the method that is different and the fact that adepts on the left-hand path seek liberation in this life."—Zeena Schreck

"The devil finds work for idle hands." - Henry David Thoreau

4.1: THE LEFT-HAND HANDJOB

Winter 1983: (Three days before Ascension)

Billy has no idea what has taken up so much of Steve's attention for a solid full hour, but it can't possibly be that important. Not when Billy is this bored. Besides, Steve had insisted that they do whatever it is he's doing over at Billy's and there isn't anything that Steve could be doing in Billy's bedroom that isn't *him*. Especially at three o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon.

Billy can already feel the dissatisfied whine of being ignored build in his throat.

"Come on, Harrington. What are you even writing over there? You *hate* writing."

Steve looks up from Billy's makeshift desk, pen hovered over the open book.

"That's a pretty general statement."

"Sure," Billy shrugs, "But it still stands. Come on, I'm bored." Billy's been passing the time building a tower out of cigarettes, removing the sticks one-by-one and piling them up carefully on the bed into an odd, lopsided log cabin. He nods toward the sad, white stack in emphasis of his point.

Steve doesn't seem particularly troubled by Billy's plight, returning to his writing with a shrug of his own. Billy takes the top cigarette off the tower and flicks it at him. But Steve, infuriatingly, simply catches and lights it up, taking a deep drag of smoke into his lungs without looking up from the book.

The dismissal burns like the butt of the paper pressed to Steve's lips. Billy glowers, his own lips twitching against the smile that's trying to rise out of the anticipation of the fight he's about to start. He isn't above fighting dirty.

“My fingers smell like cunt," he states, makes it a challenge. "You owe me.”

That, at least, gets Steve to turn fully towards him, hand shooting out in a way that’s quick but casual, drawing Billy in. And yeah, Billy was only exaggerating, but he could swear Steve’s nostrils flare slightly, like he's *smelling* him.

“They do not,” Steve rolls his eyes as his fingers wrap into Billy’s shirt collar. “All I told you to do with Barb was *flirt* with her and invite her to a party. If you’re putting your fingers anywhere, that’s on you.” He pulls Billy forward like that, with a sharp tug, and exhales his next breath of smoke right into Billy’s face. Billy doesn’t even blink.

“And if I did?” Billy presses, eyebrows raised at Steve’s indifference. “If I had taken your precious ex’s ‘best friend’ out to the quarry, fingered and licked her until she screamed? Would you be *jealous*?”

“Of people touching you?” Steve pulls Billy in closer, the sharp bridge of his nose pushing at Billy’s cheek. “Always, baby.”

Billy huffs, because he can’t tell if Steve is serious. He can never tell when Steve is serious. But the breath puffing against his face makes that constant anger swirling in Billy’s chest dull to a simmer, a flutter.

“You better be playing *nice* though, Billy. We need her.” The warning in Steve’s words is unmistakable, because Steve’s right, *again*.

Billy grunts. He shouldn’t be affronted that Steve would assume anything other than Billy’s complete compliance, he has, after all, given Steve plenty of reasons to doubt him. But still, the doubt stings.

“You know I wouldn’t.” Steve just hums. And for whatever reason, that just pisses Billy off more. “And you know she wouldn’t either.

Isn't that the whole point? Why we need *her* specifically? Because pure, pristine girls like her don't put out for guys like me?"

Steve just clucks his tongue. It lands somewhere between a chuckle and a tsk. "I don't know. You can be pretty persuasive when you want to be." Steve still hasn't removed the press of his face from the side of Billy's, so Billy can't see the leer on Steve's lips but he can hear it, can maybe even *taste* it through the sheer osmosis of their proximity.

"Prove it," Billy counters, which makes no sense, really.

"You prove it," Steve refracts back, and that way works better. Billy can do that.

There are so many ways that Billy could play it to get what he wants. He knows this, because Steve has so many things he wants. Harrington's versatile that way—insatiable. And Billy will do any of them. The only problem that Billy has ever faced in times like these is that he can't figure out a way to offer Steve everything at once.

Steve seems to be in some sort of hyper-focused mood though. He gets that way sometimes. And when he does, the best way to provoke Steve into paying anything else any sort of attention is to let him think it's his idea. Billy's already fucked that up by poking at him, but he can fix it.

So instead of dropping to his knees to mouth at Steve's huge fucking dick or even bother to try begging for Steve to touch him, Billy goes for the advanced play, stripping off the remains of his clothes until he's stark naked in the afternoon winter light filtering through the blinds. Once that's done, Billy goes in for the kill, walking steadily over to his dresser to bend his body over the side of it. The worn wood of the top of it feels smooth beneath his palms. He could technically use the mirror in front of him to look back at Steve, but he doesn't. Simply bows his head until it's pressed to the top of the dresser, forehead joining his palms on the wood. It feels like an altar, a sacrifice. Billy shivers. Just a little. The room is cold.

Billy knows this game. The one where he feigns patience. Like he's simply at Steve's disposal, available at his convenience. The body

language is a key component. Billy makes sure to arch his back just so. So that his lines and angles look as sinuous as possible, elegant even, without looking desperate. Everything needs to read, *'whenever you want me,'* and it does. Billy *knows* it does, because it's true.

He doesn't have to wait long. He never does. Not when he's like this, being 'patient' and 'good' and all the other things Billy loves to hear Steve call him.

Steve's right there behind him in an instant, breathing out a tight little curse of "*Fuck, baby,*" all reverently, like somehow Billy is the one worthy of worship. And Billy's cock swells, *throbs*.

Steve shifts behind him, fingers trailing his spine--petting, appraising. Billy widens his stance to part for him further, relaxes at the sudden dull pressure, and Billy knows it's Steve's thumb, tapping at his rim before sinking in.

It's one of Billy's favorite things, when Steve fingers him from behind, thumb in his ass while Steve's long fingers wrap up under him to brush and tickle against his balls. It makes Billy feel pierced, hooked into immobility. Everything lights up in him, emanating from the U-shape of Steve's thumb and fingers, the cup of his palm, the tingle of it looping through the closed-circuit of his body until Billy is practically vibrating with it.

Billy whines. It's not his favorite sound that he can make, but he can't always help it around Steve.

Behind him, Steve's laugh comes out throaty, deeper than his normal one. He loves it when Billy whines. "You're just *so* bored, huh? Can't even entertain yourself for a few minutes? You need me to do everything? That what you are, baby? You just some puppet on my strings?"

Billy knows Steve's joking now—mostly. Only Billy would also be lying if he didn't say that there were some truth to the words. That Steve had a hold over him, invisible ropes that pulled and tugged on every fiber and nerve whenever Billy got near him. Billy knew that it had nothing to do with *The Devil*. That Steve had a charisma all his own that Billy salivated over without any dark magic. Billy had

always just been a sucker for a pretty face, and Steve Harrington was so very very pretty.

Steve murmurs something against the fold of Billy's spine, like he knows exactly what Billy must be thinking, as he slots up closer behind him. His thumb shifts and everything inside Billy feels tender, hypersensitive and hungry for everything that Steve does. The soft pressure moves in him, clockwise, rotational, and the nerves sing, lighting up like a brush fire and Billy exhales against the top of the dresser, his own breath shaky and wet against the wood.

Steve moves slowly. On purpose. Drawing out sensation and a torturous form of want. He's testing Billy and Billy knows that. Because Steve loves to test. To push and pull and play at the edges of Billy's patience. To see if Billy can really earn and deserve the attention. Billy loves it even as he growls, something disgruntled and feral and needful. Steve just laughs, delighted in the knowledge that Billy won't actually bite. He never does. Billy will let Steve do anything and they both know it. Billy doesn't regret that though. It's hard not to let Steve do anything he wants when Steve can make him feel like this.

Another shift; another moan. Billy's not even embarrassed by the sound. Not anymore. They spill too easily from his throat these days. A lifetime of denying himself this kind of pleasure followed by the steady abundance of their insatiability.

Billy's never been particularly quiet when Steve touches him, not unless he has a reason to, and even then it's a challenge. So it's a certain kind of dark miracle in and of itself that they even hear the sound of the front door when it opens. But the door has always creaked, and Neil had never fixed it. Liking too much that he had his own built-in alert for whenever Billy came home.

Billy has always hated that creak, associates it with nothing good. Only he's suddenly grateful for it now. Sees its value and then some when the haunted screech of it echoes down the hall. The high pitch of the echo transforms into the heavy fall of boots on the hardwood and every fiber and tendon in Billy's body freezes.

Neil's not supposed to be home until five.

“Shh,” Steve hushes him, running a soothing hand over the dip of his spine, but he doesn’t withdraw his fingers— doesn’t *stop*.

Billy panics, heart rate sky-rocketing to a wild staccato, hisses, “Christ, Steve, *get off*.”

Steve just hums again, his voice pitched low. “What do you think I’m trying to do?”

It’s not funny. Not even a little. Billy jerks his head up away from the wood, catching Steve’s eyes in the mirror. Steve will stop if Billy really asks him to. Billy knows he will. But Steve’s eyes are steady, dilated but calm and in control and Billy is reminded of why Steve’s the one in charge.

“You really want to stop?” Steve breathes at him, thumb rubbing, grazing *just right* in that way of his, just shy of too direct. The feel of it swells through him, a bright burst of pleasure slicing right through the adrenaline and fear and Billy has to force the next whine back down, swallowing the sound in his throat. It feels too good to tell Steve to stop.

“Yeah,” Steve smiles, nips at Billy’s ear. “I didn’t think so.”

Billy squirms again though, restless. Listening to the ambient sounds that filter through the door even as the slow pleasure of Steve's fingers continues to shiver and build inside him. He can hear Neil’s heavy footfalls on the linoleum of the kitchen, the swish and clank of the fridge, the fizzled crack of an opened beer.

There’s no reason for Neil to assume that Billy is home. He should be at school. Neil shouldn’t come looking in Billy’s room unless Billy gives him a reason. *Unless he hears a sound*. Suddenly even Billy’s breath sounds too loud in the chamber of his room and he hiccups out a hitch of panicked air.

“Shh,” Steve’s still right below his ear, nuzzling at the pulse point of Billy’s neck and it helps, “It’s ok. I’m here. I’ve got you. You just have to be really quiet so daddy doesn’t hear you.”

It’s *sick*, twisted enough that the reflection of Billy’s lashes flutter as

he swallows that thought down hard and Steve knows he has him.

It's all kinds of wrong—not just wrong—*dangerous*. Neil is a dry wall away. The dull drone of the TV clicks on, settles on some sports game. Billy can hear the creak of the recliner. Neil settling into his usual perch where he can keep an eye on the door, ready to greet Billy when he gets home. It sinks in then: the implications. Neil is home from work early, way too early. He must have left two full hours before his shift ended only to wait to greet Billy at the door. That can't be good.

It never is.

That really doesn't bode well for what will happen if Neil finds him here instead: completely naked and bent over his own dresser like an offering while the Hawkins High Golden Boy takes him apart with just the crook of his thumb. Which, despite the situation, Steve still was doing, and then some.

The fear of being found has Billy's whole body going tense, which only makes Steve's fingers feel thicker, highlighting everywhere they touch. Billy's toes curl into the carpet, Steve's thumb working slow circular rubs into the thrust. And then Steve gets his knuckle pressed right up into That Spot and Billy sees stars, eyes rolling back. He must make some kind of sound, or had started to, because Steve's other hand is suddenly at his lips, palm encasing his entire mouth, muzzling Billy into silence.

The pressure of that pleasure stays. Steve just knuckles in further, absorbs Billy's groan with a tighter flex of his hand around the sound.

"We could kill him you know," Steve says, conversationally.

Billy's eyes snap open. He hadn't realized they were closed. Everything swims around him when the pleasure's this good. Turns the world fuzzy and white.

Steve's eyes glow in the mirror. Almost supernaturally bright, but once again, Billy has come to know that's just all-natural Steve. His irises are just the kind that draw in the light, always hungry for it. It's what makes him look sympathetic on the street. His big eyes shining

like an animation. Something deceptively tamed that at the end of the day still came from the forest. Something still free and wild. One that can see the other animals around him in lines as simple as predator and prey.

“You like that idea?” Steve seems like he’s fishing, but he has to know it’s something Billy dreams of. Of cutting Neil and the plague that the man carries around with him out of his life for good. That sometimes the ‘cut’ in Billy’s deepest fantasies is literal. That every time Billy takes a hit and tastes his own blood on his tongue, he thirsts for Neil’s.

Steve knows. Because somehow Steve has always known the core of him, but Billy nods anyway, a brief jerk of his head from behind the reins of Steve’s palm.

Steve’s smile spreads and Billy’s knees feel weak. "How would you wanna do it, Billy?” Steve presses, all words and fingers. “You want to smother him, maybe? Make it real quiet? We could use one of those hideous throw pillows of Susan’s from the couch. She took all that time with the cross-stitching on them. It’d be nice for her to *contribute* for once, huh. Or maybe a good strangling? Your fingers are so thick and pretty; I wanna see em put to good use. Fuck, baby, it’d be so hot to watch you choke the life out of him. Bet he’d get so red. More flushed even than the time he dragged you out of the diner last week. Bet he’d love to hear all about how far down my throat your cock had been that day. How good you tasted. I could tell him all about it as you press the life out of him. We could do it *right now*. If you're worried about him catching us. I can go out there, slit his throat right in his lazy boy. Then we can fuck as loud as we want. No worries."

Steve’s words work better than they should, the wicked impossibility of them pushing Billy higher towards that apex as he chases the burning pressure of Steve’s thumb with hitches of his hips. Billy’s movements are distressingly hampered by the dresser itself, the sounds it makes if Billy rutts up too hard against it too loud to risk. He can’t get enough friction without making noise, not by himself. Steve must know that, too. Because Steve shifts, moves like he’s going to pull away—to pull back. And Billy shakes his head—a little too frantic, a little too animal—to stop him.

“You don’t want me to go?” Steve asks, teasing. Like he doesn’t already know *all* the answers. Like he doesn’t know that there isn’t a single thing on earth that Billy would trade with having any part of Steve inside him. That even if Neil was to come crashing into the room right then, with Billy this far gone—this close to the edge—that Billy would still beg them *both* to let him finish.

That alone is something that should fill Billy with horror. Should be the reason to *stop*. But for all the terror that thought evokes, there’s something heady there too—the idea that his father might see just how many of the words he likes to call Billy are *true*. For his father to really see how much, at the end of the day, Billy really does just want to bend over and *take it*. And that, given the right motivation, he does it so well.

Billy glares at Steve in the glass. A mixture of aggression and desperation. Billy tries not to think about how often he probably looks like that. That this is what Steve must see when he looks at him.

But Steve doesn’t look disgusted by the combination in the way that Billy feels like he should. Instead Steve just looks *pleased* and *wanting*, like Billy and his clusterfuck mashup of emotions and devotion is the most fascinating, precious thing he’s ever seen.

Steve’s eyes lock on his and Billy knows he’s about to break, that crest of pleasure building up over him, taking him higher. The sharp teetering edge of it making him convulse and spasm in the silence. In an instant, the warm weight of Steve’s torso pushes right up against him. Steve’s leg slots in between the parted spread of Billy’s, Steve’s knee pushing against the inner curve of Billy’s thigh. Steve’s jeans rub, chafes against Billy’s skin, reminding Billy that Steve is still fully clothed, in control, muscles tense and alert, ready for a fight.

Billy never lets go in his house. He *can’t*. It simply isn’t safe to let himself go loose--too dangerous to relinquish control of any of his senses within the perimeters of the Hargrove hallowed grounds. But things are different with Steve. Billy’s confident that Steve could slay on a dime if he needed to and Steve says as much, the promise thick in the timbre of his voice as he curls his chest over Billy’s spine, wrapping himself around him until Billy feels covered, enclosed.

Untouchable by anyone but Steve.

“Let’s do it. After *It’s* done, we’ll hunt down my monsters and then we’ll take care of yours. He doesn’t deserve to keep sucking down the same air as you. He’s taken too much from you already.”

Steve’s words feel like a promise. Steve likes to make promises and he always keeps them. But he also likes to play games. Billy has no idea if this is one of Steve’s promises or his games. But his breath whispers over the crook of Billy’s neck so sweetly.

“Just three days, Billy. Just give me three more days, sweetheart, and I’ll do it. Three days and I'll make him pay for ever daring to lay a hand on you.”

It’s sounding less and less like a game. And the anticipation of it quivers through him, slithers up Billy’s spine to join the dark parade of pleasure marching upward toward the brink. About to tip him over. Billy still doesn’t have enough friction, the acute tease of Steve’s thumb the only thing playing him to the end. Little rubs and soft presses to his favorite spot. It’s too gentle--too *sweet*. It shouldn’t be enough. But it is. At least when Steve presses in closer, confirming the raw reality of the moment with his low-spoken words. “No one else. Never again. I *promise*, Billy. Nobody hurts me but you; and nobody hurts *you* but me.”

And yeah, it’s a *promise*— one that sends Billy over in a rushed flurry of pleasure. Billy comes nodding, an automatic movement as he struggles to agree, to say ‘yes,’ ‘thank you’— *something*— the range of the movement limited, reined-in by Steve’s palm on his lips as Billy tries not to scream like he wants to.

The feel of splitting apart under the safe blanket of Steve’s chest at his back is overwhelming and pure, lighting him up as his body shivers and shudders to the pulse of Steve's words. The dark promise to not just save him, but to *liberate* him. To slice and carve the world into a bright new space where Billy is free.

Steve lets them both lay for a moment on the dresser, letting Billy’s breathing settle, staving back the full rush of adrenaline of what they just *did* with Neil right down the hall. Neil gulping down his beer in

his fucking recliner, keenly awaiting a boy who was actually already in his room, doing all sorts of wicked, sinful things under Neil Hargrove's roof.

Billy makes another embarrassing sound at the thought, getting lost in it for a beat before Steve is tugging Billy up and into him. Steve still has a palm around his jaw, but he releases his hand in the final moment to bring Billy's face to his in order to kiss him, something wet and deep.

Steve's still hard in his jeans. The rigid hot length of him burns into Billy's hip and Billy wants to touch it, salivates to get it between his lips. His fingers are still shaking as he goes for Steve's zipper and Steve catches him, strokes his own fingers across the shiver of Billy's palms.

"Not right now. Later. Let's go to my place. I'm not leaving you here with him and I want to be *loud*."

Billy nods again, adrenaline still swirling through his skin. His very bones feel dizzy with it.

Come stains in a dripping vertical river down the oak. Billy will have to clean it before Neil sees. No use provoking him in the final hours: The countdown of days. Even if Steve wasn't serious about leaving only a husk of the man behind them, they are still getting out.

But Steve, as always, must know what's on Billy's mind.

"I wasn't joking, you know." Steve says as he helps Billy's loose limbs get back into his clothes before further helping him climb out of his bedroom window. The one benefit of a single-level home: an exit on the ground floor provided they're quiet. Steve's words might be spoken lowly in the moment, but he means them. "I would do it: You know that. For you. I *will* do it for you." Steve's fingers are soft where they brush through Billy's hair, pushing the errant curls back from his face like Billy thinks his mother used to do. "I'd kill anyone who touches you wrong. He'll just happen to be the first."

Billy looks at Steve, the steady determination there, the magnetic pull of his confidence and his conviction. And Billy can't help himself as

he pushes back into Steve, gets Steve's back up against the outside siding of the house to crash his own mouth over the open, relaxed part of the other's. Billy just came but he feels suddenly just as desperate to get Steve inside him— more of him. To consume Steve whole until Billy's skin is stuffed full of him.

"You're a fucking angel," Billy breathes. And he believes it, knows it to be true.

Steve smiles around his tongue. And just like that it's decided. Agreed and signed in come and sweat. Neil Hargrove wouldn't see the end of the week.

5. “THE DEVIL HAS DOMINION OVER WATER”

“Wherefore, the days will come that no flesh shall be safe upon the waters.” —Doctrine and Covenants, Section 61:15

5.1. “THE DEVIL HAS DOMINION OVER WATER”

Winter 1983 (1 day before Ascension)

By six thirty p.m. on Friday, Dustin has done more cannonballs than Steve has seen from any other kid in his life combined. It doesn’t seem to matter to Dustin. He just keeps climbing out of the pool, taking running starts from further and further back on the concrete and splashing in. When he breaks the surface this time Steve calls out to him, “Hey take a rest would you? You’re getting more water outside the pool than in it.”

Dustin swims up to the edge and rests his arms on it next to Steve who takes the opportunity to light a cigarette. Now that water isn’t constantly being splashed all around him he can smoke it safely. Steve’s still wearing his gloves. Has been all week. Dustin hasn’t thought much of it until now, watching Steve in swim trunks and sunglasses, leather gloves standing out and clashing with the look.

“Are your hands cold?” Dustin asks. Steve holds his hand up and looks at it. He smiles.

“It’s winter, Dustin. Need to keep my hands from getting chaffed.”

“You look ridiculous,” Dustin counters, which is only partially true. Steve always looks cool. Even when he sits outside of the heated water of the pool in nothing but his low-slung trunks and his stupid leather gloves to keep out the icy outdoor chill. Dustin would ask if the rest of Steve was cold, but he can tell Steve isn’t. Steve isn’t shivering like Dustin would be outside of the water, and there aren’t even any ripples from the air on his skin. As far as Dustin knows, Steve has never felt cold outside. Steve told him once that it’s because he ran hot. Which, whatever. Dustin thinks it’s because Steve just doesn’t like wearing coats or putting hats over his hair. But Dustin also figures that whether Steve really feels the cold or not, it’s

still a little impressive that he can pretend not to for the sake of "fashion" or whatever. In fact, Dustin has never seen another person who wears less in winter— that is, until Billy Hargrove had moved into town.

Dustin doesn't want to hurt Steve's feelings, or look uncultured or uncool, so he amends, "I mean, isn't it weird to wear gloves and no jacket?"

From his perch beside the pool, Steve ashes the cigarette onto the table where it melts into the thin layer of ice that has formed over the metal. He looks at it for a moment, contemplative and maybe even a little captivated, like he's divining something in the water. When Steve speaks, it's still with his eyes on the melting ash. "It's high fashion on the coast. Tom Cruise is doing it."

This seems wrong. Or at least not quite right. Dustin scrunches up his face. "He wears leather gloves at the pool?"

When Steve looks up from the table, all of his attention settles on Dustin like the sun. "Yeah. Think about it," Steve speaks so easily about it that Dustin assumes it has to be true. "It's hot in L.A. like all the time, so why bother wearing gloves, except for fashion? The juxtaposition of gloves on the beach calls *attention* to how fashionable they are."

Dustin shrugs. His hair feels dry and brittle in the cold air hovering above the heated pool, so he dips beneath the water, lets it soak up, and then comes to the surface again. Steve transfers his stare towards his left hand in the glove. Almost lovingly. Dustin has to admit that they *do* look pretty cool on Steve, but everything does, so it's hard to tell if he should be doing it too. But Steve would have told him if Dustin needed gloves, right? He figures it's probably best to make sure, just in case.

"Should I be wearing gloves too then? If it's something that's, you know, cool?"

Steve quirks his lips a bit and then slants his body back, like he's trying to take all of Dustin in, consider him from all the angles. "You know what, Dusty, yeah, I think you might just be cool enough to

pull them off, too. Tell you what, I have some extra pairs in the house. You can pick one out when we get inside."

"Can I have those?" Dustin asks, pointing at the ones Steve has on. He's suddenly very excited, because Steve is going to give him gloves and then he can look just like Steve—sort of.

Steve looks back down at the leather on his hands. "Nope, not these. I said when we get inside."

Dustin looks a little crestfallen—nothing too serious, but sadder than he should be over not getting to take Steve's gloves right off of him. "Why not?"

"Because *I'm* wearing these already. And I told you it's fashionable to wear them *next* to the pool, not *in* it. You have any idea what submerging lambskin in chlorine would do to the leather?"

Dustin, point-in-fact, has *no idea* what would happen to lambskin in water, but Steve makes it sound pretty serious, so he changes the subject. "Why aren't you swimming too?"

Steve shrugs, "Don't want to."

"I can't believe you have a heated in-ground pool and you don't, like, swim in it all the time."

"Swimming alone is boring," Steve says, waving his hand around, smoke from the cigarette pulling lazily out of it.

"You could invite more people over," Dustin suggests. "If you had a pool party every weekend the D&D Party would always show."

Steve's lips crack upwards at the corners, teasing. "Like I can afford to feed you monsters every week?"

"You have an *in-ground pool* Steve. You can afford *anything*."

Steve laughs at that. It's a real laugh and not the one Steve puts on for girls or grownups sometimes. His sunglasses hide Steve's eyes, but not his Duchenne marker. Steve only has the Duchenne marker for a very few selection of people. Dustin is happy to be included in that

list, but feels a little weird when he remembers that recently, for whatever strange, unknown reason, *Billy Hargrove* has been put on that list, too.

“You probably *do* have tons of people over every weekend. It’s probably like a huge pool party with all the older kids.”

“Now Dustin, what is the point of a party that you aren’t at?” Steve’s teasing him and Dustin knows it. Dustin rolls his eyes. He knows that’s not true. He’s not an idiot.

“You might not *want* me at a party if there’s an orgy.”

Steve snorts. He covers his mouth like what Dustin has said is so funny he spit on himself a little. “The fuck do you know about orgies?”

“What do *you* know about orgies?”

“I know your mom’s at one right now.”

“Ew!” Dustin swats water at Steve who moves to cover his cigarette. He saves it, but only narrowly. “Gross dude.”

“You really think she’s at a cat breeding conference? What even is that?” Steve teases and Dustin splashes at him again but only half-heartedly. So many cannonballs has him running low on energy. Dustin wonders if he swam like this every weekend maybe he’d be able to make the basketball team like Steve or Billy.

“Have you though? Ever had an orgy?” Dustin presses because he’s really curious and when a question, a mystery, gets a hold of him he can’t back away. His life would have to be threatened and even then…

“Tell me the first thing you know about orgies.” Steve relights his cigarette. It takes a couple tries but he’s smoking again in less than half a minute.

“I know it’s gross that my mom would be at one.”

“I’ve never had an orgy,” Steve finally answers. Then he thinks,

tossing his head back and forth. “But I have had a threesome.”

“What? No way.” Dustin’s jaw is open. Steve leans all the way back and lays down on the wet concrete. Lets the dull rays of the winter sun slice into him and that reminds Dustin to check the timer on his waterproof watch to make sure he doesn’t have to reapply sunscreen —the ozone not enough to keep him from burning even in December. He still has twenty-four minutes.

“Oh yeah. A couple times. Once at an away game in Bloomington,” He pauses to think, “and again at Tracey Martin’s Halloween party last year.”

“Woah, with Tracey Martin?”

“No way,” Steve waves his hand dismissively through the exhale of his cigarette smoke like the idea is a truly ludacris one. “Tracey Martin is a selfish lover. I’d never even attempt a threesome with her. Threesomes are about teamwork.”

Dustin’s eyes go wide. “So then who?”

Steve looks down at Dustin over his glasses. “Are you sure you’re ready to know? I think it might break you, Dusty.”

Dustin just nods, hands clasping the edge of the pool, feet kicking with anticipation in the water.

“Nancy and Jonathan.”

Dustin splashes him again and the cigarette does not survive this one. He even gets Steve’s sunglasses so wet he has to take them off.

Dustin feels a little guilty for a second in the aftermath of the splash. The nip of cold air mixing with the water on his skin should make Steve shiver. But he doesn’t.

Steve quirks an eyebrow instead, surveying Dustin’s expression as it wars between curiosity and revulsion. “I’m serious. How do you think they got together? I’m a matchmaker at heart.”

“I may not know anything about orgies or threesomes, but I know

you're full of shit, Steve." Dustin lifts himself out of the water. He struggles with it a bit. His arms aren't quite strong enough to hold him, so Steve has to help him along a little.

"You shouldn't be asking about that shit anyway. You're too young."

"I'm going to be thirteen in like two months."

"Oh ho ho excuse me, big man on campus. Thirteen. Lock up your daughters." Steve pulls another cigarette out from the ziploc bag he keeps them in. He has to keep them in a ziploc bag next to the pool because he loves to smoke and lounge by the pool but Dustin is constantly moving water. It'd be a waste of a good pack if he didn't keep them in a ziploc bag. Dustin is a little proud because the bag was his idea like a year ago and Steve still does it.

"I mean that you can talk to me about that kind of stuff. Like I'm older, you know? Like guy talk." Dustin picks off a leaf that's stuck itself to his batman swimming trunks. "You don't have to go to Billy Hargrove for that kind of thing."

"Trust me," Steve laughs softly, privately, "that is *not* what I need Billy for."

Dustin rolls over on his side and props his head up on his elbow. "What *do* you need Billy for?"

Steve sidelines the question like he does everything else—smoothly. "Is it just me or are you more annoying than usual?" Steve smiles. "Is it going to be this inquisition all weekend? This is worse than when I took you to see Blade Runner."

Dustin lays flat on his back again, wrapping himself tightly in one of the fuzzy fleece towels that Steve had brought out for him to use. It feels more like a blanket, but it's still a little too cold now that he's out of the pool. The sky is dimming into an orange glow, something soft and lazy, a shade that reminds him of his mom's eyeshadow and he misses her just a little bit.

He feels more than he sees Steve lay on his back next to him. "You should try and stay a kid for longer, Dusty," Steve says softly, lazily,

like it was just a thought floating telepathically from his mind to Dustin's. Something private and sad. "Things are worse when you see something, you know, awful and horrifying that takes that away."

"Like an orgy?"

Steve laughs again, "Yeah, or worse."

It's so quiet between them. Dustin closes his eyes and doesn't fall asleep but feels light and drifting. Like he's floating on the water. He realizes he's never done that in Steve's pool; never just laid back and floated, weightless.

"You know that energy department in the woods? Did you know that's just a couple miles into the woods up there?" There's something in Steve's voice. Something slightly sad and important. Something that makes Dustin think of how his grandfather used to sound on the few occasions he would talk about "The War."

Dustin sits up. Looks at the tree line of the woods behind The Harrington House. He didn't know that, about the power plant, but now that he pictures it in his mind over the map of Hawkins, he's sure Steve is right. He looks over at Steve. The older boy's eyes are closed and he just holds the cigarette in his loose hand letting it burn away. "I snuck in there once. When I was your age. Or a little younger. Stupid dare Tommy put me on. He wouldn't go himself because he's a coward, but I snuck in. Security there was shit." Steve is talking now like it doesn't matter, like it's just a boring story or a dream he had once, but his voice is so low, as if it were a secret. Dustin leans in a little to hear.

"What did you see?" Dustin says, equally as soft, as if the question could break the quiet tension, scare Steve out of continuing.

"Darkness," Steve answers softly, "such a deep darkness I never could have imagined." Steve's eyes are still closed and his eyelids are still. There's no movement behind them and Dustin wonders how he can look so still while he talks so gravely. "'I penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness'," he whispers and Dustin shivers. Maybe from the cold. The sun is setting. He isn't immersed in the heated pool. Dustin is cold and he hadn't even realized it. He doesn't

move though, not to get another towel or sink back into the warmth of the pool. He feels he can't leave Steve for even a second. Steve's eyes open and Dustin jumps at that, as if it were terrifying to see Steve's deep brown eyes swimming with some past nightmare. Steve sits up and puts out the cigarette next to him, half finished, unimportant, a warmth burning out. "The horror, the horror," He whispers, eyes turning to lock on Dustin.

"What was it?" Dustin can barely hear himself ask the question.

Steve puts his hand on Dustin's back. He makes no other movement, just lets it sit there. "Hold onto the innocence, Dusty. It's so important."

And Dustin is absolutely about to probe that; ask what the heck Steve means; ask him to share more because whatever he saw, whatever he's talking about, it shook something loose in Steve. Something that's been rattling around inside him ever since. Dustin thinks he saw it the other day, when Steve had stood above Troy and James, something unnamable and inverted peeking out from behind his Raybans. But he can't ask about it because Steve shoves him into the pool. He laughs while he does it, laughs at how Dustin shouts and waves his arms in a panic, and by the time Dustin breaks the surface, Steve's sunglasses are back on. He's laughing and standing up. He grabs a towel for himself, leaves a fresh one next to the pool for Dustin.

"Pizza's gonna be here, dude. Wash up." Steve pads into the house, leaving Dustin alone in the water. Dustin reaches for the new towel but stops. He closes his eyes and leans back. He kicks himself off of the wall, lets his arms float out beside him, and until the sky turns pink instead of orange, he floats, weightless. The only thing weighing heavy on him is the way Steve smiled without his Duchenne marker.

** ** **

Dustin is yawning just as Jack Nicholson is slamming an axe through the bathroom door and that's when Steve brings him a tall glass of coke. Dustin beams at him. Steve really just gets him. Still beaming, Dustin reaches out to take the offered glass with his freshly gloved hand, flashing the red and white leather of the fingerless gloves Steve

had let him have after Dustin got out of the pool. Steve's own gloves have fingers, but Steve had assured him that the fingerless were just as cool: Dustin trusts him.

The glass of coke is huge, which Dustin appreciates. He takes a couple sips off the top because it's a little too full for Dustin to handle. The coke tastes a little funny— kind of saltier than it should. Dustin wrinkles his nose at the sip, but it's not actually all that bad. Steve probably has some fancy kind of coke that comes with diamonds ground into the bubbles or something. He's pretty sure he read about that somewhere. Or maybe he saw it in a movie. Or maybe Lucas told him. But, whatever. If anyone was going to have jewel dust in their sodas, Steve would.

The phone rings and Steve is about to answer it on the line in the den, but Dustin whines at him that he can't hear the movie. Steve waves him off and says, "Just a second. I'm going to switch to the kitchen phone." He touches a couple buttons on the high-tech device and slips out of the room.

Steve's old gloves are a little big on him. The leather is slippery without much traction and it makes drinking from the cool, tall glass a little more difficult. Dustin doesn't think of himself as clumsy. He's at least a little better at catching himself than Will is. Will gets distracted looking everywhere else and then face plants. Dustin at least has developed reflexes to catch himself.

He reminds himself of this when he spills the coke all over the floor, stain splashing and spindling outwards all over Mrs. Harrington's baby blue carpet that probably costs more than Dustin's mom has saved for his college. If Will had spilled the coke, he'd have wasted time staring at it in shock, but Dustin's reflexes kick in and he instantly goes to hiding the mess. He is, of course, whispering "shit, shit, shit" the entire time, but he's a man of action.

Dustin looks through the crack in the door. The phone cord for the kitchen phone is stretched tightly down the hallway in the other direction, which means Steve didn't see anything. He does a quick survey of the scene. There's a lot less stuff in Steve's den than there is in Dustin's own living room. If Dustin were home, this would be easier. His mom has so much stuff lying around that could easily be

tossed over a stain— plus, his mom isn't crazy enough to install a light-colored *anything*. But everything in the Harrington's den is ridiculously either white or a shade away from it. It's like the Harringtons had no idea what children were, like they had never had one before, or something. Steve must have been a really clean kid.

Working quickly, Dustin pushes the coffee table forward over the mess, only the table is glass, and see-through, and doesn't help *at all*. Dustin doesn't really have a choice then, so he shoves at the overstuffed weight of the couch until it moves forward six-or-so inches to cover the stain completely. Pushing the beige leather monstrosity takes a lot of his strength, and he maybe, sort of, leaves some fingerprint smudges all over the back of it. But Dustin hopes that the Harringtons maybe don't spend that much time looking at the back of their couch. It's less noticeable than the carpet at least. Winded, he slumps down and leans against the back of the coach, panting with exertion. Eventually, maybe, the stain will be noticed, but by then there will be no evidence to tie it back to Dustin.

The sound of Steve's voice is audible from the kitchen. Dustin can't hear what he's saying, but Steve's voice echoes down the hallway in a tone that's both low and sultry. He must be talking to a girl. He thinks back to Lucas saying Steve probably has girls over after Dustin goes to sleep. It is a big house. Feasibly, Steve could have a dance party or something and not even disturb Dustin.

Steve laughs at something the caller says. It's throaty and deep, somehow both knowing and surprised. Dustin strains to listen as his curiosity compels him forward, closer to the crack of the den door. He makes out something that sounds like "*yeah*" and "*baby*" and Dustin tries not to snort. Steve used to talk to Nancy Wheeler like that, sometimes. He remembers from the times Steve used to be over at Mike's, always upstairs with Mike's sister, who used to be kinda cool until she started to try and impress guys like Steve. But that was like two years ago, and Steve's voice had never sounded so low.

"*Is that so?*" Steve asks in a way that Dustin has to conclude is indeed very much "so" whatever "that" is. Steve chuckles again, clicks out a 'tsk' sound with his tongue. "*Oh, I'll show you what you can do with that dirty fucking mouth*," Steve practically purrs into the phone and Dustin has no idea what that means either, exactly, but he knows its

something *gross*.

“Nah, Dusty should be out in about fifteen minutes,” Steve says, and Dustin hears this clearly because Steve’s voice isn’t sultry when he says it, and Dustin can always hear a little better if the topic is about himself. “He yawned during the ‘Here’s Johnny’ scene….Yeah, I gave him a drink.”

At the reminder, Dustin looks down and sees that his clothes did not survive the coke spill. Swiftly he’s up and at his overnight bag, grabbing his pajamas and changing into them, hiding more of the evidence in the bottom of his bag. He hears the phone click back onto the hook in the kitchen and Dustin dashes back to the couch, hitting it a little soon having not calculated the slight change in position. He lays down to look as casual as possible when Steve comes back in the room.

Steve stands there for a minute, looks from Dustin, to the coffee table, to the TV, then back to Dustin. His eyes have some confusion in them, and Dustin keeps watching the movie like it’s the most important thing in the world.

“Did you,” Steve begins suspiciously, Dustin holds his breath, “finish your coke already?” Steve smiles, amused, and Dustin laughs with relief.

“Yeah, man. I was like, really thirsty.”

Steve chuckles and goes to the entertainment center, opening one of the drawers and pulling out a throw blanket. One of the really soft quality ones that, if he didn’t know Steve Harrington, Dustin never would have seen. Steve plops on the couch next to Dustin and throws the blanket over him. Dustin lays back and positions himself comfortably against the pillow he brought from home. On the TV, the little kid is running through a snow maze. Dustin thinks again about the fact that Steve expects him to be asleep in fifteen minutes so he can have his mysterious phone guest over. He wonders if it’s that mystery girl that Steve’s been seeing lately. Dustin still hasn’t ever actually seen her, but he knows Steve has been seeing her a lot because Dustin keeps finding the evidence: like the black eyeliner in the bathroom cabinet that Dustin knows Steve doesn’t use, and the

long blond hairs he had found in Steve's shower after the pool.

Dustin is *very* curious to finally see the girl that takes up so much of Steve Harrington's time. Steve can get any girl he wants, so she's probably really pretty. Dustin hopes she's also really cool, like Steve. But at least Steve seems to be smiling a lot more lately, so either way, Dustin wants to see who she is. Steve needs to think he's asleep for that to happen though, so Dustin closes his eyes and makes his breathing steady, listening closely for Steve's movements. The sound of the movie stops, the VCR whirring, the click of the TV going off, and then Steve shuffling out of the room, one last ruffle of Dustin's hair before he goes. It feels a little wrong because Steve's gloves keep a distance between them. The texture is different than Steve's bare hands. Then quietly, kindly, Steve whispers, "Sleep tight."

6. Lambs, Opfers, and Other (Fallen) Angels—Part I

Notes for the Chapter:

> This chapter is LONG and has thus been split into Part I & 2 for your reading convenience, uploaded simultaneously back-to-back. Thank you to all who have left comments, kudos, etc. You are very much appreciated. <3
>
> **POSSIBLE WARNINGS*** So… Here's where shit starts to get a little crazy. Dustin, Steve, and Billy will be fine, but if you are concerned about others who might perish/survive part 1 and 2 of this chapter, see the respective chapter end notes in both for the details. (You can also feel free to reach Deep_South on Tumblr @ False-North for further spoiler queries).

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." —Romans 12:1

"Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else." — Mitch Albom, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*

LAMBS, OPFERS, AND OTHER (FALLEN) ANGELS—Part I

Billy knows the key to any good set up is to make the mark think it's her idea. That's why when he pulls into the Harrington driveway, he makes a big show of seeing that Tommy and Carol have already arrived. He hits the steering wheel, groans, closes his eyes, and shakes his head distraught. Barb moves a little closer to him and puts her hand on his shoulder, close, intimate, and he turns to smile at

her. “Sorry,” he says, making his voice heavy with remorse, “I didn’t think they were going to be here.”

“It’s okay. I kind of thought they might be,” Barb sighs.

“We don’t have to go,” Billy offers, “I know you don’t like them.”

“It’s fine,” She says with a small smile. Barb is pretty when she smiles — not that it matters. But she really should do it more often, while she can.

“Really?” Billy moves a little closer to her, feels her tense up in her legs and her fingers, even through all the layers she’s wearing— whole piles of chastity armor in orange flannel and creamsical ruffles. “I’m serious. We could go right now. Just the two of us.”

Barb grins, she looks away whenever she tries to flirt and that’s cute; it’s innocent, it’s what makes her perfect. “Like I’d be any safer alone with you.” That makes Billy laugh. She’s a smart girl. And on any other night, she’d be right. He takes her hand and runs his gloved thumb over her knuckles. “Just say the word and we’ll leave, okay?” He promises. She nods.

“I just,” she shifts; she pulls her hand away, closes her eyes and opens them again, “I like spending time with you so,” she trails off, and Billy nods, even though that isn’t something he particularly understands coming from a girl like Barb— a nice one. Nice girls don’t like spending time with Billy. It would almost make him nervous. That Steve was maybe wrong about her after all. But Steve had promised: Nancy *‘Holier-Than-Thou’* Wheeler would know, which means that Steve would know too.

“Let’s go, Barbie,” he leans forward and pecks her cheek, a move that makes her face light up in red. And yeah, Steve has to be right about her; he always is. She’s still in the passenger seat until Billy comes around the side and opens the door for her, makes a grand show of offering his hand for her to use to step out of the car. He crooks his elbow after, lets her hold onto the bend of it all the way up the walk to Steve’s door. Billy can be a downright gentleman when he wants to be. He just usually, well, doesn’t want to be. But they need Barb. She’s the key. She’s precious and important and deserves to be

treated with respect.

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“As I live and breathe,” Tommy yells, way too loud into Billy’s face when he opens the door, “It’s Billy Hargrove the keg king!” Tommy takes a long swig of whatever is in his glass. One of Steve’s dad’s crystal tumblers, Billy notices. Steve really is rolling out the red carpet for this. “And who is this?”

Barb rolls her eyes. “We’ve met, Tommy. Like a million times. We’ve been in school together since the third grade.”

Tommy blinks at her, bending his torso forward a few inches to get a better look at her face beneath the porch light, “You sure?”

Billy scowls, shooting Tommy a warning look over the back of Barb’s head. Tommy has never had the proper level of respect for anything. But Billy does know that Tommy and Carol will do anything Steve wants them to: eager and willing and without question. Steve’s *relationship* with those two idiots is something that Steve has been cultivating since grade school. Tommy might be dumb, but he’s loyal, and Billy sees the value in that. He respects what Steve has done to earn it, so Billy doesn’t verbally correct Tommy on the disrespect. But he does shove Tommy hard out of his way instead so he can lead Barb inside.

“Ow!” Tommy pouts. “No need to be rude, Hargrove.”

“Don’t be a *dick* Tommy,” Billy warns him. Seriously, if Tommy and Carol ruin all the work he’s put into Barb all week he’s going to murder them first. It’s not like Neil alots him a whole lot of spare time and warming over Barb wouldn’t have been on his list at all if Steve hadn’t requested it. And if Steve wanted something, well, Tommy and Carol weren’t the only ones who were infallibly loyal to Steve Harrington.

Billy puts his arm over Barb’s shoulder and walks further into the house. Carol almost runs into both of them coming out of the bathroom. She smirks at Barb and then at Billy’s arm around her. Billy’s fist clenches on instinct, ready for a fight, but Barb

unconsciously moves a little closer into Billy's body, and it's alright: the plan is still in motion.

"Hey Barbara," Carol says with a grin that's far too wide, which really isn't all that unusual for Carol seeing as she's always been the kind of bitch that bares her teeth. "You didn't bring Nancy did you?"

"Why the fuck would we bring Nancy?" Billy sneers.

"She had plans with her family," Barb explains.

"She wasn't invited," Billy adds. "Where are the drinks?"

"You want the tour?" Tommy comes up and slides his arms around Carol's waist. "Kitchen is through there. That leads to the pool." Tommy points and Billy's attention drifts away. He knows all he needs to about the house. "The den is back there, but don't go in there. Dustin is asleep and Steve will have a conniption if we wake him."

"Steve's having a party while babysitting?" Barb sounds a little disgusted.

"It's more like a gathering," Steve's voice cuts in, all smiles and cocked angles from the kitchen doorway. "Thanks for coming." He's holding two drinks in his hands as he approaches, handing one to Billy and holding the other out to Barb.

Barb looks at it, a little unsure. She glances at Billy and then back to Steve. "I'm actually— is there alcohol in it?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. Is that not okay?" Steve sounds sincere, which visibly makes Barb feel just a little more comfortable. Tommy and Carol may be assholes, but Steve would never be mean to one of Nancy's friends. Or maybe, Barb thinks Steve really is kind of a nice guy.

"I'm not drinking. I might have to drive us later," She explains.

"No problem," Steve beams at her, "safety first. This guy drinks like a fish anyway." Steve smacks Billy on the shoulder and it takes more than Billy's proud of to keep from pushing back, just to prolong the pressure of Steve's touch on his. But Billy manages to stay right

where he is, face schooled into a mask of passivity and indifference as Steve offers his arm out to Barb. “I’ll show you our selection of sodas.” Barb laughs a little nervously, taking Steve’s arm and glancing at Billy to see if it’s all right. Billy nods and they vanish into the kitchen. Billy glances at the den door. His fingers itch under his gloves. It settles into him that tonight is the night, it’s all happening right now, in just a few hours. Everything Steve promised is just a few hours away and behind that door Dustin sleeps soundly having no idea the important role he’ll play. Barb, one wall away from the kid picking out soda, doesn’t either.

Tommy nudges at Billy, getting his attention. He and Carol look stupidly pleased. Then again, he and Carol look stupid always. “I can’t believe you got her here,” Tommy whispers.

“You doubted me?”

“We thought Nancy was the only person who could talk her into anything,” Carol explains.

Billy bites down on a growl. Instead he smiles, tongue darting out over his bottom lip as his eyes trace over what he can see of Steve from where he’s slightly bent over the kitchen island to pour Barb a new glass of whatever she deemed appropriate. Steve’s been wearing his pants tighter lately and it *works* for him. Billy’s eyes land on the slight, tight curve of Steve’s ass and stay there. The smile turns genuine, if not a little hungry. “Yeah, well, trust me,” Billy doesn’t even bother to look back at Tommy; he doesn’t need to to know that Tommy is listening. Tommy is always listening. “Anything Nancy Wheeler can do, I can do better.”

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Dustin hears the commotion but lays still on the couch until the noise settles in the living room. He recognizes the voices, including Barb’s, but he doesn’t actually believe that it’s Barb until he peaks through the back door of the den, the one that connects to the living room, and sees her sitting between Billy and Steve in the circle. He’s confused by this more than anything, because Nancy and Jonathan aren’t even there. Dustin could imagine Barb going to a party if there were more people she knew and trusted going. But who would

willingly come to a party with Tommy and Carol, without more people to diffuse their attentions? Dustin is a little happy though, Steve hanging with Barb is preferable to the other company he's keeping lately. Like Billy Hargrove, who is, regrettably, also still present at the party, too, but Steve should hang out with more people like Barb. Barb is kind, smart, and responsible; she'd help Steve make better choices. Maybe it's a makeover situation? Like Steve is gonna tweek Barb's style and turn her into a popular girl? Dustin feels like he saw that in a movie, or several, and that seems like something Steve would do for a nice girl like Barb. Steve probably gets most of his ideas from movies.

Dustin searches the room for the mysterious blonde, but the only girls there are Carol and Barb who are both redheads. There are a lot of girls with red hair in Hawkins. Dustin doesn't really have another town to compare the redhead population to, but it seems like a lot. He likes Max's hair best. But Steve likes blonde hair. Dustin knows because Steve had winked at Dustin not too long ago, informing him while watching some old movie that *'gentlemen prefer blondes.'* So it makes sense that Steve would go for blonde over red hair. Dustin's not exactly sure what a gentleman is, but the word reminds him of James Bond, and James Bond reminds him of Steve. Maybe she's showing up later?

Out in the living room, Carol peels herself off of Tommy and places an empty bottle in the center of their circle. Dustin notes that neither she nor Tommy are wearing gloves. He beams at that; clearly they're not cool enough to pull the look off. Dustin can see that Billy is wearing his gloves still, definitely an old pair of Steve's, but he keeps putting his thumb in his mouth and biting it.

Dustin rolls his eyes because, sure, maybe having gloves in the pool was bad for them, but surely slobbering all over them is just as bad. Billy's even staring at Steve as he bites them, probably some power play to show how much he disrespects the things Steve gives him. Dustin is willing to admit that Billy does look cool in them, he might have even been the one to tell Steve about the Tom Cruise thing. Dustin makes a mental note to ask Max later if she's ever met anyone famous while living in California.

Billy finally catches Steve's gaze. Steve's eyes lock on Billy's and hold

while Billy slithers his tongue around the tip of the leather and then bites down harder on the pad of his thumb which, judging by the way Billy winces and shivers, must hurt a lot. Steve smiles.

He smiles?

Steve smiles. At Billy. Biting himself. In an old pair of Steve's gloves.

Billy keeps his eyes focused on Steve as Billy leans forward to give the bottle in the center a good hard spin. Dustin is pretty familiar with this game, but he's not sure he understands it. If you want to kiss someone, why would you not just kiss that person? Certainly if Steve Harrington wanted to kiss someone, he just would. The bottle seems like an ineffective middle man that hinders kissing more than helps. The way Lucas and Mike put it, if a girl wants to kiss you, she'll lean in and do it. But maybe when you've kissed as many girls as Steve Harrington has, you need to add something to the experience to make it more interesting.

The bottle lands on Steve. Dustin wonders if there's something in the rules that says you're allowed to spin again? But Tommy laughs and claps his hands together. Billy looks eager, eyes skating up and down Steve's body where Steve is sitting on the floor, canted back against the base of the couch. Steve doesn't move towards Billy, makes no effort to change his body language.

"Truth or Dare?" Billy asks.

Maybe Dustin *doesn't* know the rules of this game after all.

Steve smiles, spreads his arms out wide on either side of himself to rest them on the couch seat behind him. The position, as casual and effortless as it is, commands attention. For some reason, it reminds Dustin of the crucifix his grandmother had in her kitchen. Now that he thinks about it, his grandmother might have been Catholic. It's his grandmother on his father's side, though, so he never really sees her; he doesn't really remember her all that well. But Dustin can remember that cross and how weird and kind of creepy it was. Steve doesn't look creepy though because he's very much alive, practically glowing when he quirks up his eyebrow and drawls, "Dare me, Hargrove."

“I dare you,” Billy’s eyes flick across the room and Dustin swears they rest on him for just a second. Billy doesn’t react though, so maybe Dustin is just paranoid. It’s not like he’s seeing anything all that bad really. Steve probably won’t even care that Dustin was watching. This is all pretty mild. “To kiss everyone in this circle.”

Okay, wait, so maybe Dustin *does* know how to play this game? Teenagers are so ridiculous. There are hoots and hollers from Tommy and Carol. Billy looks pleased with himself. Barb is glowing red and picking at her nail polish. Steve tips his glass back, emptying the contents.

Steve slams the glass down and points at Billy saying, “Hargrove, that’s all you got?” before he turns to his right and grabs Tommy by the lapels. “Been waiting to do this since the third grade, Tommy,” Steve says with mocking sweetness. Carol claps again, muttering something like “finally” into her glass.

It’s not a long kiss, and it’s definitely not a serious one. Tommy even turns his head slightly so it lands more on his cheek than his mouth. When he’s done, Steve shoves Tommy back so hard that he falls into Carol. Carol tosses Tommy aside and crawls near to Steve, laying her hands on either side of his face. This is closer to a real kiss, but is still pretty chasted. It probably has to be with Tommy sitting right there.

When Steve pulls back from her, Carol’s mouth follows him, leaning forward to search for more, but Steve puts his finger on her lips and pushes her back, smiling kind of wickedly. If Dustin were Tommy, he’d be pissed right now, but Tommy is just watching and chewing on the ice from his drink. Carol, pouting, sits back down on the carpet and leans back in against Tommy.

Steve turns toward Billy after, but he doesn’t move towards him. Instead, Steve crooks his finger at him, silently commanding the blond to come to him. Dustin doubts that Billy, who had remained stretched out on the ground, laid back, up on his elbows and completely relaxed since “the game” began, would ever budge just because someone’s index finger curled to summon him. That does not seem like the kind of thing that would go over well with *Billy Hargrove* at all, and Dustin is a little worried for Steve what Billy will choose to do about it.

But when Steve beckons him forward, Billy immediately lifts himself up enough to flip his body over, pulled forward as if on a string, as he prowls closer. The distance to where Steve has returned to his own sprawl against the couch is only a couple of feet, and Billy crosses it without getting up from his knees.

It doesn't make sense. Billy Hargrove is *crawling* to Steve at the crook of his finger.

Dustin can't see Billy's face from his angle through the door, but he can see Steve's and Steve… doesn't look surprised. Steve looks at Billy like Dustin's mom looks at his science fair projects. Like how it never matters if Dustin wins first place or not, his mom still always pats his head and tells him they are going out for ice cream because she never imagined she would have a son as wonderful and smart as him and that she's *proud*.

That doesn't make any sense either, but Steve is still beaming anyway, sly smile on his lips as Billy gets closer. It can't be easy to move on all fours that fluidly, Dustin supposes. But then again, Billy Hargrove was definitely some kind of animal.

It doesn't take long for Billy to enter Steve's orbit and Steve sweeps his hand off the leather seat to clasp his fingers around Billy's neck once he's in reach. Steve uses the grip to pull Billy in and down just a fracture into his space until Billy's face is hovering just over his. Billy freezes there in the suspension of it, holding perfectly still other than his teeth working hard at his bottom lip and Steve's grin goes a little wider, a little darker, as he gently pushes some of Billy's hair out of his face.

Dustin notices that Barb's face is red and facing down, but her eyes are locked up on the two boys. Carol has a similar look on her face, although less ashamed, more unabashedly eager to see it happen. Dustin isn't sure what the appeal is here for Barb or Carol, but he knows that it *exists* because of a Kirk/Spock story he found tucked under Nancy's bed once when she was thirteen. It was long, and Dustin didn't have time to read all of it, but one of the scenes he did read, one that was dogeared by Nancy, reminds him of the way Billy and Steve are looking at each other now. After that, Dustin felt very differently when he watched *Star Trek* and he assumes he's going to

feel very differently around Steve and Billy after this.

Steve is taking so long to just do it. He was so quick with Tommy and Carol, but it's almost like he's savoring the anticipation of this kiss with Billy.

Everything moves slowly. Steve's gloved thumb pushes down on Billy's chin, urging his mouth open, something Billy once again obliges to surprisingly easily with a sound that's too muffled by the distance for Dustin to properly hear, but one that makes Steve's eyes flash. And just like that the suspension snaps as Steve lunges into the pried-open space of Billy's mouth tongue first and there's not enough distance in the world to block out the way that Billy Hargrove moans. It's a kind of kiss Dustin has never seen before— even though most of the kisses he's seen have happened in the last ten minutes. It's a kiss with teeth and growling.

It's *mean*.

Which makes sense right? Billy's mean and Steve probably low key hates him. But the weird part is how Billy is smiling, leaning into the cruelty, like he truly enjoys it. Like this is exactly how he wanted Steve to kiss him and Steve somehow *knew* that. Steve's hand squeezes tightly into Billy's neck and Billy pushes further into that, his whole body coming into contact with Steve's from their mouths all the way down to where their knees sink into the plush living room carpet.

Carol squeals with delight into her drink, the crystal amplifying the sound to a pitch that hurts Dustin's ears a little.

Steve bites down on Billy's bottom lip, hard enough that when he pulls away Billy is bleeding a little. Dustin isn't sure if anyone else sees it; Billy is wiping it away onto the gloves before anyone can comment on it and he falls back next to Barb with a wild exhale, eyes locked onto Steve.

Dustin could swear Barb is sweating a little when Steve's eyes land on her. She looks away and Steve stands up and holds his hand out to her. Her shoulders shift, she looks at Billy as if for help, but he only nods, eager, like he really *wants* Barb to kiss Steve. Which, if Dustin

had been kissed like that, he doesn't think he'd want anyone else to go through it.

Barb takes Steve's hand and he helps her to stand. Puts his hands on her shoulders and softly strokes them. "Don't be nervous," he says softly and Barb laughs really loud at that.

"Easier said," she gulps.

Steve chuckles. "It's fine. Okay? It'll be quick." Steve can still be devastatingly charming when he wants to be. He positions his body casual and loose in front of Barb, like he could swoop in and sweep her off her feet like all the princes and pirates in the movies. Dustin recognizes when Steve goes in for what Steve has described before as his "signature move," bending his neck forward just enough to enter the borders of Barb's space as his hair falls artfully over his eyes.

In the warm glow of the living room, Barb looks at Steve like everyone looks at Steve, like he's everything they never knew they wanted until he's right there in front of them, and then suddenly he's all they can see. Barb still hesitates though, blushing under the intensity of Steve's casual but insistent body language. "Nancy might-"

"Don't worry about Nancy," Steve says gently, tilting his neck just a little bit further so that his face catches the light. "Don't worry about anything. Just close your eyes."

Barb is tentative, but she does close her eyes. She leans forward. Dustin notices the others moving around, dispersing as if trying to give them privacy. This is a strange point for them all to care about privacy. Steve presses his lips first to her forehead, then her nose, and finally lands on her lips. She sighs into it, whole body going a little limp. She might topple forward if Steve didn't have a firm hold on her shoulders.

It's so quick that Dustin isn't sure he's seen it until the red blood comes pooling out of Barb's neck like a sticky wet scarf unravelling. Tommy is there with a large crystal punch bowl, something for the blood to flow into and not a drop of it gets onto the carpet. Barb's head is jerked back to open the wound further, and Dustin finally

sees Billy behind her, pulling her hair and holding the knife.

Dustin scrambles back from the door and holds tight to the scream inside him.

Barb is dead.

Steve just killed Barb.

Well Billy killed Barb, but Steve didn't stop him? And Steve isn't reacting like Barb is dying in front of him.

And they're collecting the blood.

Dustin doesn't think; he rushes to the den phone and dials 911.

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Dustin heard from Lucas once that even if the cops think it's a prank call they are required to go check out the situation anyway. So when the woman on the phone is condescending to him, when she all but calls him an attention seeking liar, Dustin just rattles off the address to her and hangs up. There's shouting and movement from the living room. Dustin jumps from his left foot to his right in a nervous dance, waving his arms not sure what to do next. Should he escape? He could maybe make it to the kitchen quietly. Then just sneak around the front of the house into the woods. He wonders how far into the woods he can really make it by himself and without shoes. He looks down at himself in his pajamas and shakes his head. He's got to try right?

The voice that filters in through the cracks of the door is easily recognizable as Steve's: it's commanding, loud, and it ceases every other noise in the living room. Dustin even freezes. "We're almost ready. We just need to get the blood of the innocent. Billy, come with me. Tommy, you and Carol get the body out of here." There's no argument. No one asking, *"what the fuck did we kill Barb for?"* or *"why do we need innocent blood?"*. It's also a little weird that Steve says they still need "innocent blood," because if that isn't something they have already, then what was Barb? But they also aren't asking *"where are we going to find innocent blood,"* and that's maybe the most

disconcerting thing yet in a night absolutely overflowing with disconcerting things. Because this is when Dustin realizes that Steve is talking about *him*. They need *Dustin's* innocent blood.

That cinches it: he needs to get out now. Dustin thinks about grabbing his overnight bag, but there's just no time; the shadows under the door are coming closer. He rushes out the door to the kitchen, pushes open the patio door just enough to squeeze his body through. He's terrified and confused, but he's also focused on getting out of this alive.

The air outside is frigid, even for December, but he barely notices the chill. That at first seems like a blessing except that Dustin, later, will realize he should have been more focused on his surroundings, because he slips on an iced patch of water near the pool. One left over from his million cannonballs earlier that evening. He doesn't fall onto the concrete and "bust his head open" as his mother and Hawkins lifeguards often warned him he would if he ran next to the pool. Instead, he goes flying headfirst into the pool. He can't hear it well under the water, but he knows it makes a loud sound.

Panicked, he turns under the water, twists so much he's not sure which is the bottom and which is the surface until the bubbles clear. Once he knows, he rights himself and frog paddles upward, breaking the surface and gasping for air. He scrambles to the edge, feet kicking wildly and splashing water everywhere, but there's no use in trying to be stealthy now after the initial crash.

His fingers have just managed to scrape the rough texture of the pool's siding, when he's grabbed by the back of his shirt and yanked up and out of the pool. Blinking the chlorine from his eyes, Dustin sees it's Billy, grinning Cheshire. Standing behind him, arms crossed and looking very disappointed in Dustin, is Steve Harrington.

"Look at the fish I caught, Harrington," Billy jokes.

Steve sighs, "You're supposed to be asleep."

Dustin shrugs as best he can in Billy's grip. "I was sleepwalking," Dustin offers. Billy rolls his eyes. Steve comes forward and crouches down to be at eye level with Dustin.

“I think you’re lying to me.” He says it so kindly. Like Dustin lied about taking the last slice of pizza. It’s so innocent and familiar and it contrasts with the horrible thing he’s just seen Steve do.

“Come on, Steve,” Dustin doesn’t want to cry, is determined not to, but the way his voice comes out certainly sounds like crying. “I couldn’t sleep. I just wanted— you know, you have so much fun and I — ”

“You ruined the gloves,” Steve sighs, plucking up one of Dustin’s gloved hands and inspecting it. “I was so clear about that, Dusty. These are very expensive.”

“I’m sorry?” Dustin offers. Steve pets Dustin’s wet curls and it makes him feel like a wet dog, just dripping onto the concrete while Billy holds him there.

“It’s okay,” Steve takes something out of his back pocket and walks out of Dustin’s line of sight. “You know I can’t stay mad at you.” Dustin twists in Billy’s hold trying to see what it is. He’s not sure what’s worse: seeing this wicked version of Steve, or having him be behind his back. “Don’t worry, buddy. We’ll make sure you sleep this time.” There’s the small prick of a needle, a mosquito bite of pain, and Dustin feels himself lolling off. His eyes are heavy. He tries to bite down on his cheek to keep himself awake. He registers the sound of a police siren, Billy loosening his grip, his body being lifted and carried away. Then it’s all darkness.

Notes for the Chapter:

> The following do NOT survive part I of this chapter: Barb. Yeah, we are sorry, but Barb’s cannon storyline in the show sort of set her up thematically for a blood sacrifice situation. (It happens quickly and isn't super graphic.) Does Barb deserve better? Absolutely. Are we terrible people for capitalizing on her cannon death anyway? Yes. Is the most unbelievable part of this entire fic premise not even satanic sacrifices and immortal teenagers, but that Barb might in some way be “straight”? Also, yes.

7. Lambs, Opfers, and Other (Fallen) Angels—Part II

Notes for the Chapter:

> Once again, Dustin, Steve and Billy will be fine, but see end notes for any other minor character demises, sacrifices, etc.

LAMBS, OPFERS, AND OTHER (FALLEN) ANGELS—Part II

When Dustin next wakes up, his body feels tight, held and hugged too snuggly around his arms and chest. His left arm hurts, right at the inside of his elbow. His vision is blurry and he tries to move his hand to rub at his eyes, but he can't pull them. There's a fuzzy figure bobbing in and out of his sightline in front of him that he comes to recognize as Steve when it speaks.

"Doing all right, buddy?" Steve sounds kind and concerned as he pushes a glass of something with a straw into his lips. Dustin is really thirsty, he can't remember why, but his mouth feels so dry, so he takes a long sip, gulping down most of the glass as his vision clears.

Steve is smiling at him, straddling the back of a chair and watching Dustin swallow down the water. "That's good," Steve says with encouragement, "don't want you to faint or anything." Dustin pulls his mouth off of the straw and looks down. He's definitely tied to a chair, propped up in one of the rooms in Steve's house that Dustin has never been in before. There's a large oak desk in the center and rows of shelves with leather-spined books that look like law tomes, and the snazzy kind of speaker system that produces the kind of audio waves that sound expensive. Those speakers croon out a song from the record player as he sits bound to what Dustin can only deduce is Steve's dad's office chair. The song is something that sounds old and faintly familiar. Like something he might have heard once playing over a scene in a movie at a fancy party. Dustin couldn't care less about identifying it any further than that: His arm is throbbing and he can't see it too clearly, but he's sure there's a Band-Aid on it.

At first Dustin thinks he might be alone in the room with Steve, but that isn't true. Looking up he finally sees Billy, standing behind Steve and totally shirtless.

"Where," Dustin begins. He closes his eyes and shakes his head, like maybe he can rattle himself out of this nightmare.

"Take your time, Dusty. There's no rush," Steve assures him.

"Where is his shirt?" Dustin asks all accusing. He didn't mean to ask that question in that tone. He meant to use that tone to ask what the hell was going on. Why did they hurt Barb? What are they going to do to him? But no, the insanity of Billy shirtless in the Harrington living room took precedent.

"Hm?" Steve looks behind him at Billy and seems mildly baffled by this himself. "Billy where *is* your shirt?"

Billy shrugs, casually, "Got blood on it."

"Ah," Steve says, nodding and turning back to Dustin. "He got blood on it."

"Um Steve?" Dustin licks his lips. He smells chlorine all over himself and feels like he's still dripping. For a brief insane moment, Dustin has a flash of panic that Steve's father might get mad that his huge rolling office armchair was destroyed by pool water. Which is stupid because that is the least of Dustin's problem's right now and not even his fault. Besides, Dustin's never actually even met Steve's father. The man only apparently comes by Hawkins maybe once or twice a year. Dustin always thought that seemed like it would be kind of lonely for Steve. But he's not sure how Steve feels about things anymore. And that's when it finally sinks in. *Steve*. Steve is...crazy? Maybe? And a *killer*, certainly. Dustin's head feels thick and heady with confusion. He's not sure what all is true. But he knows this isn't a nightmare, not one he's asleep for anyway.

"Is this, like, some kind of prank? This is just a weird joke right? Like you're messing with me?" The heat is cranked up in the room and there's a fire going in the fireplace. Steve must have been concerned about him catching cold from face planting head first into a

swimming pool. That show of care and consideration is more like the Steve Dustin knows. But that only confuses him further.

Steve takes out a cigarette and lights it. He never smokes inside and Dustin wonders when this all changed? He's seen so many changes in Steve tonight, how many more can there be? Do they all fall in the range of serial murder to ashing on the carpet?

"Why did you call the cops?" Steve asks, pinning the cigarette between his lips and inhaling. Dustin realizes now, and he checks Billy too, that the gloves are gone. Steve's fingertips are smooth and white.

"Cops? I didn't call the cops."

"Then why did the cops show up?"

"Maybe you were partying too loud?" Dustin suggests.

"Dustin," Steve sighs, squeezing the bridge of his nose like he's getting a headache, "I'm really disappointed in your behavior this evening."

Dustin gapes. "*You* are disappointed in *my* behavior?" Steve nods like that was a serious question, non-rhetorical. "You— I literally saw you kill people!"

"Just Barb," Steve corrects.

"And the cops," Billy adds.

"Oh yeah." The memory dawns on Steve as some kind of forgotten after-thought. Dustin doesn't even want to know how someone would — could— forget that kind of evening detail. But Steve relinquishes the correction easily, "Okay, and the cops."

From behind him, Billy apparently spots and then begins scrubbing at something on his fingernails, rubbing them casually against the denim of his jeans to buff them as he cuts in again, "Tommy too."

Steve turns to look at Billy with mild surprise. "What? When did you have time to kill Tommy?"

Billy shrugs. Whatever is on his nails must not be coming off, because he brings them up to his mouth and licks at them, swiping his tongue obscenely across the nail beds and his knuckles before returning to buffing them against his pants. “He was all ‘call an ambulance; I’m bleeding out’ and shit. Super loud. You know I get headaches, Steve. He was being *so annoying*.”

Steve sighs, “Yeah that does sound annoying.” Steve turns back to Dustin. Steve counts the bodies out on his smooth fingers, “Okay so we just killed Barb, the cops, and Tommy-”

“Carol’s dead too, actually,” Billy amends. Steve is definitely annoyed at this. He closes his eyes, presses his thumb into his forehead.

“For fuck’s sake Billy,” Steve groans, “I’m trying to talk to Dustin, can you please do something useful?” Steve takes a drag off his cigarette and turns to face Billy. “Just go pile all the bodies into the den.”

Billy doesn’t move. He scrunches up his face in confusion. “The fuck is a den?”

Steve turns back to Dustin, rolls his eyes because Billy is *so* uncultured and can Dustin even believe this guy? Dustin can literally not believe anything he’s seen tonight.

“A den is similar to a living room but it’s further inside of the house. It’s the room with the TV in it.”

Dustin’s binds are tight on his wrists but the gloves aren’t. He slowly tries to work them off. If he can get out of them, the ropes might be loose enough for him to slip out.

Billy scrunches up his face and Dustin isn’t sure if it’s because he’s confused or annoyed, but he doesn’t really care. “What do you need *two* living rooms for?”

Steve turns all the way around in his chair to look at Billy, finally looking shocked by someone else’s questions for the first time that night. “One is for conversing and the other is for watching TV.”

“Who the fuck has *two* living rooms?”

“If you guys would rather have this argument alone-” Dustin begins. Steve waves him off, eyes still on Billy, the bickering still in play. The first glove is the hardest so Dustin switches hands. The left is coming much easier, the inside still wet from the pool.

“It’s a common architectural floor plan, Billy. At least for people whose houses aren’t on wheels.” On any other day Dustin would think that that was a little cruel for Steve. Billy clearly doesn’t like it, getting angry when Steve insults his house but not batting an eye at multiple homicide.

“Fuck you, Harrington. I don’t live in a goddamn trailer.”

“I never said that you did.”

“You kind of said that,” Dustin mutters. Billy points to Dustin. With his left hand free of the tight leather of the glove, getting the right one off is simpler.

“Thank you, Dustin. Nice to know someone isn’t being passive aggressive. I live in a three bedroom with a garage. That’s *standard* even for the upper middle class— ”

“The subcategories of the middle class don’t exist, Billy. They’re arbitrary-” Steve interrupts and then pauses. He turns back to Dustin and points at him accusingly, “Dusty are you wiggling out of your binds?”

Dustin freezes. Blinks once, twice, three times, then shakes his head. “No? How would I even do that? I don’t know how. You tied them so tight.”

“You are the worst liar,” Steve says coming around behind Dustin’s chair and tightening the ropes.

“I told you we should have used zip ties,” Billy mutters pretty loudly. So loudly Dustin wonders why he bothered muttering? He clearly wanted Steve to hear that.

Once again, Steve surprises Dustin by smiling. Not his cold calculated smile he’s been flashing all evening, but a genuine one that lights up his face even as he continues to sound exasperated, snapping his

fingers Billy's way and pointing back towards the other end of the house. "Yes, you were right. I was wrong. Bodies. Den. Now please?"

Billy rolls his eyes, but does pause on his way out of the room to push himself up against Steve's side for a flash of a moment. Long enough to press his lips against Steve's cheek, once again not even trying to quiet his voice as he quips out a, "*Yes, Steven,*" before swaggering out of the room.

The bonds are even tighter now. They'll leave a bruise, Dustin is sure. Steve comes to stand in front of him again, still smiling.

He crouches down to Dustin's eye-level, concern written all over his face. "Doing all right kiddo? Want some tea? I've got chamomile," Steve says. He offers "chamomile" like it's the single most exciting tea in the world.

"Did he put you up to this, Steve?" Dustin whispers, glancing at the doorway Billy left through. "We can go to the police together. Just untie me. We can take him."

Steve laughs. He saunters to one of the book shelves, puts the cigarette out into a crystal ashtray. "That's hilarious. Like you don't know exactly how hilarious that is, but trust me: that's really funny." He lights another, holds the smoke in his lungs a little longer than before, and leans easy against the wall. "Billy knows only what I tell him. Does what I tell him. He's good people that way. This was all my idea." Seeing that Steve is serious, that what he's saying is real and being able to tell that from his eyes, fills Dustin with terror. A terror so strong he starts screaming.

Steve doesn't move to cover his mouth or stop him, only winces at the sound. He keeps smoking, waiting for Dustin to tire out. Which he does. "Okay so one: no one can hear you," Steve says holding up one finger, then a second, "and two: Billy has a headache so that was really rude."

"Oh god," Dustin groans.

"Three," Steve goes on holding his thumb out, "I'm trying to have a conversation with you like an adult and you're just screaming at me.

That's not productive." He pauses. He and Dustin stare at each other until Steve exhales smoke again. "Okay you can talk now. At a normal volume please."

"What is wrong with you?" Dustin asks exhausted and furious but at a normal volume as requested.

Steve shrugs. "What kind of question is that? How am I supposed to answer that? I wanted something, I made a deal, I got it. A better question is what's wrong with *you*? I put enough sleeping pills in that coke to knock you out for the whole night."

"You *drugged* me?" If Dustin really thinks about it, yeah, that makes sense, he guesses. But the idea of it still really hurts. He feels betrayed, gutted, and his face shows it.

Steve is quick to see it. In a quick flurry of movement Steve is there, crouched in front of the chair. He places a soothing hand on Dustin's forehead immediately, like he's checking for a fever, his eyes wide and sympathetic to Dustin's distress, "Hey, what's wrong? You feel sick?"

"You drugged me!" Dustin shouts at him, utterly indignant. Steve stays right where he is, crouched in front of him and waiting for Dustin to continue, to get to the part where he tells Steve what's wrong. When Dustin doesn't continue any further, however, Steve stands back up to pace the room, apparently confused by Dustin's *irrational* display of emotions.

"Well apparently, I didn't. That's what we are trying to figure out, Dusty." Steve explains to him patiently, like Dustin had trouble with a homework problem, or a question about girls.

"Why? Why would you drug me? I thought you cared about me! I trusted you, Steve!"

"Hey now. There's no reason to get upset. You *can* trust me. And I *do* care about you. That's *why* I drugged you. You weren't supposed to wake up."

"What, ever again?" Dustin asks petulantly, because he's scared, but

he's also kind of seriously pissed off.

Steve looks genuinely surprised at that. Like the idea that Dustin would think that Steve would want to hurt him after Dustin had seen Steve slaughter half of Hawkins in his living room was just plain *ludacris*. "No! They're just sleeping pills. You would have been fine. Don't be so dramatic, buddy. I needed you asleep so that this precise scenario didn't happen. So, once again, why aren't you?"

Dustin sniffs, looks away from Steve and shrugs as best he can in the ropes. "I don't know. You messed up I guess."

"No," Steve's voice is dark, insulted, "I didn't."

"I don't know what to tell you Steve. Maybe you thought you put the drugs in but you didn't. Or you put it in the wrong glass. I don't know, I didn't know you were going to *drug me* so it's not like I didn't take it on purpose."

Steve crosses the room. Stands in front of Dustin and puts his hand on the boy's shoulder. Gives it a good squeeze and Dustin can feel the heat from the cigarette near his ear. "I know you're lying to me, Dustin, because I *know* how to do this. I know how it works. So tell me: why aren't you asleep?"

"Harrington!" Billy calls from the other room. Steve doesn't pull away, doesn't even turn his head, he needs to keep staring into Dustin's eyes. That cigarette is way too close to Dustin's ear; he's going to choke on the smoke if it stays there much longer.

"What?"

"There's some stain under the couch in here."

"What's it look like?"

"Sticky. Brown." There's a rustling sound followed by a surprised shout and then Billy's voice is carrying back down the hallway again, "Ugh, gross. It's all wet."

Steve sighs and shakes his head, finally pulling away from Dustin and dragging on the cigarette. "You spilled your coke on the carpet?"

Steve concludes and having an answer, such a simple one, amuses him. “Why didn’t you tell me?” His face shifts to one of sympathy. “Did you think I’d get mad? Seriously, dude, with stains like that you have to act quickly. You should have told me.” Steve takes in a deep breath and rubs the back of his neck like he’s working a knot out from stress. “Coke has dye in it, Dustin. That’s been there for hours now. It’s never going to come out.” Steve looks *heartbroken* on a level that might have been appropriate before he cut someone’s throat open during spin-the-bottle.

This degree of disappointment is an absolute outrage to Dustin. He shouts, “Are you kidding me? You just put *bodies* in there. That you *killed*. And guess what: Blood stains too Steve!”

“What did I say about shouting?”

“I don’t care about that psychopath’s headache or your f-f-freaking carpet!” Dustin feels that if there were any moment in his young life to drop the “f-bomb” now would be it but something holds him back anyway. Partly it might be the way Steve’s looking at him, like maybe Dustin is one rule break away from literal death. Dustin also feels that one needs confidence when saying “fuck” and he’s definitely lacking that just now. His mother would be so disappointed, too, if his last words were a curse.

“Sugar attracts bugs. Ants. It would be an infestation.”

“Bodies attract bugs!” Despite what Steve has made clear about yelling Dustin has to yell. It’s the only thing that makes him feel better right now.

“Not when we’re done with them,” Steve offers, plain and simple. Not even a threat. And that’s just John Carpenter levels of messed up but Steve still talks like he’s only upset about the carpet. In fact he *is* still upset about the carpet.

“What? What does that mean? No,” Dustin shakes his head, “Nevermind that, I don’t want to know. You *killed* them, Steve!”

“Hey, hey,” Steve puts his hands up defensively, “I didn’t kill anyone. Technically, Billy did.” Steve pauses while he finds the ashtray again,

puts his second cigarette out in it and then pads himself down for his pack. “Well, he killed Tommy and Carol at least. I’m just as surprised about that as you are.”

He pulls the pack out but it’s apparently empty because he tosses it in the bin. He looks back at Dustin, noting the boy’s silence, and he smiles as if giving up something. “Ok, no, I’m not. Billy has some jealously issues." And Steve actually looks *pleased* about that, eyes flashing stupidly soft for a split second before they sharpen back into focus. "Besides, they weren’t all that useful anymore.”

Steve pulls a couple of the books off the shelf and reveals a hidden pack of Marlboro Reds tucked away there. He plucks them from their hiding place. He doesn’t open them, or light another, just tucks it into his pocket and comes to sit in front of Dustin again. “Hey, it’s okay, Dusty. They were assholes. Even Tommy’s own mother couldn’t stand him. No one will miss them, it’s fine.” Dustin isn’t sure why Steve’s trying to be so comforting until he sniffles. Dustin started crying at one point, probably when Steve started speaking so casually about a kid who was his best friend until a few hours ago.

“It’s not ‘fine’, Steve.” Dustin has never cried in front of anyone before except his mother and once in front of a Mall Santa when he was four. There’s something particularly humiliating about doing it in front of Steve right now. Made even worse when Steve takes out a tissue and wipes Dustin’s face.

“You’re going to need to calm down, buddy,” Steve advises gently. Dustin pulls back, as best he can in the chair, away from Steve and his tissue.

“What about me? Am I still ‘*useful*’?” Dustin’s tone is bitter and it properly hurts Steve.

Steve moves the chair closer, brushes some of Dustin’s curls back. Billy comes back into the room, finished with his task in the den, and waits for further instruction. There’s more blood on his body than there was before. He has a half-empty bottle of amber liquid in his hands.

“How can you even ask me that? We’re friends. I’d never hurt you.”

Steve sounds like he means it. But he can't possibly. Dustin has seen too much and he knows what bad guys do to kids who see too much. He probably only has minutes left to live and the last thing he said to his mother was "bring me back a snow globe".

"Did they, you know, suffer?" Dustin isn't sure he really wants to know, but that's what the people on all the crime TV shows his mother watches asks, so Dustin's compelled to repeat it now.

Steve looks surprised by the question, "Suffer? I don't know." Steve looks to Billy. "Billy, did they suffer?"

Billy shrugs, "How should I know? I've never bled out before; how am I supposed to know what that feels like?"

Steve sighs, "You'll have to excuse him. He's lacking in empathy."

Dustin blinks at him. "Yeah, He's not the only one," he mutters. Steve, of course, doesn't even react to that, so Dustin isn't even sure Steve heard him, or if he, you know, didn't react because Dustin was *right*. Dustin really wants some kind of information though. Something that at least explains tangentially why this is all happening, and why it's happening *now*, so he tries a different way. "Why Barb? She was," Dustin swallows a lump in his throat, "Barb was nice."

"I know, Dusty," Steve sighs, tossing the used tissue away into the bin. "But you know it's really hard to find a virgin in this town."

"Whose fault is that, Harrington?" Billy asks, popping the top off the bottle and taking a swig.

Steve rolls his eyes in Billy's direction. "You didn't exactly *help* did you? Clare Briggs would have been just as well."

"Clare Briggs was *not* a virgin," Billy shot back. "She knew what she was doing."

"This is the most disgusting conversation I've ever heard," Dustin says, "just for the record." Billy takes a heavy drink from the bottle, some of it spilling onto his chest where it swirls through the blood, rewetting the patches that had dried on his skin. Dustin's nose

wrinkles in disgust.

“Could you use a glass please?” Steve says, exasperated, and for a moment, Steve looks as equally alarmed as Dustin, but Dustin doubts it’s from the blood. “That’s a Hennessy Ellipse.”

“It tastes terrible.”

Steve sighs. “That’s because you’re not savoring it.”

“Why did you need a virgin?” Dustin asks a little quietly. Steve focuses on him again, now that Dustin is speaking, apparently less concerned about Billy getting a glass. “Why did you need to kill a virgin?”

“Oh that,” Steve laughs, “The Devil is all about the details. One wrong step in the ritual and things go south pretty quickly.”

“You aren’t answering me,” Dustin spits out, frustrated, moving past shock and hurt, although he’ll feel that still even tomorrow, and settling firmly into anger. “It had a purpose right? A reason? Tell me you at *least* had a reason, Steve.” Because if it was just for the sake of violence, Dustin thinks he might pass out from that.

Steve is contemplative. He looks back at Billy and they exchange something unspoken that Dustin can’t read. Billy walks out of the room, Dustin thinks at first to give them privacy, but then he’s back again in less than a minute with two glasses. He pours the Hennessy into them. Steve turns to Dustin, “I guess you’re old enough to know.”

Billy comes close to stand behind Steve and Dustin can smell the blood clearer now. The copper scent stinks, it makes his eyes water but when he closes them he just sees the massacre and that makes it worse. He decides to keep his eyes open and he sees Steve taking one of the glasses from Billy, swirling the booze in it lazily. Billy gulps his down so quickly it’s a wonder he even bothered to listen to Steve and pour it into a glass. He pours himself another and offers it to Dustin only to have Steve shove Billy’s arm away. “You can’t give a twelve-year-old alcohol.”

“Why not?” Dustin mutters. “You’ve already given me PTSD.” *If I live through this,* he thinks.

“What’s that? You know I can’t understand you when you mumble, Dusty. You need to speak up,” Steve chides. Billy sets the bottle down on the ground, holds his glass like Steve does, and moves to stand behind him.

“I said I’ll probably have to see a shrink after this,” Dustin snaps.

“Ugh,” Billy grimaces, “I hate therapy. It’s a fucking scam.” His free hand touches the back of Steve’s head, threading his fingers into it and stroking reverently. Steve doesn’t push him away but rather cocks his head back a little into the touch.

“Really?” Steve asks, amused, “I liked my therapist.” Finally Steve takes the smallest of sips from the glass, swallows slow, then sets the glass to rest on his leg. “You wanted to know the reason right?” Dustin nods and Steve repeats the motion. “Nothing comes from nothing. Everything is a trade, a deal. So take a guy like me, what do I want?” Steve pauses to sigh wistfully like this is the first time he’s really thinking about this. “I have all the material things a person could want. But let’s say I want more than that.”

“We sold our souls to the devil,” Billy cuts in.

Steve balls his hand into a fist, closes his eyes and snarls out a sound of frustration as he rubs his long, scared fingers against his temple, like he doesn’t know if he’s angry or disappointed, “Fuck, Billy, I was trying to build a fucking moment.”

“We don’t have all night. We have to light up the house and we’ve got two stops after this.”

Steve Harrington *pouts*. It would almost be funny if it wasn’t so terrifying. “I know the plan, okay? It’s my plan. I came up with the plan. I’ve got my eye on the clock.” Steve pulls his hair out of Billy’s ministrations, shouldering him away. “Don’t touch me. I’m upset with you now.”

Billy seems particularly hurt by this as he steps away from Steve and

walks a few feet to stand on Dustin's left. He perches himself on the arm of the sofa drinking with a pout of his own that looks more like a puffy scowl.

Steve rolls his eyes, turning to Dustin and sighing, "He's so impatient. He gets antsy."

"You're not serious?" Dustin asks, looking between them. "*The Devil*," he clarifies as they both stare at him. "I mean, like, you don't mean literally? You're talking all figurative right?"

Billy snickers into his glass, giving Dustin the only answer he really needs: this is real or they're crazy— or *both*. Either way Dustin can't see this scenario ending well for him. Dustin looks back at Steve, trying to decipher the bored way he's looking into his drink. He doesn't look evil, any more so than yesterday. He just looks like Steve: bored, cool, focused, like only the most important things deserve his attention.

"What did you ask for?" Dustin's question is soft. He thinks maybe Steve didn't hear him. Steve doesn't look up, instead takes another sip of Hennessy. Dustin wonders if he should repeat himself, but he's not sure he wants to know. Steve could have anything he wants, Steve *does* have anything— *anyone*-- he could want. Nice car, huge house, multiple pairs of lambskin gloves, in-ground pool, rugs you can't spill coke on, his pick of girls, and even Billy Hargrove wrapped around his finger, apparently. Dustin didn't realize that last one until tonight, but it's evident with the way Billy looks at Steve, the way he hangs on his every movement, itching for a look, an order— a dog eager for a command.

Steve empties his glass. He runs his thumb over the rim and Dustin winces as it sings out in a note too high to be pleasant. The sound stops and Steve stands up. "It's more fun to show you," he says and even before Dustin can remember that this is an answer to his own quiet question, Steve hurls the snifter at the wall. Billy moves his head, shoulders jerking up in reflex even though the glass didn't come near him.

Billy settles just as quickly when Steve snaps his fingers at him, "Get some of that glass."

Billy obliges, setting his snifter on the ground and crossing the room in bare feet. Dustin's mom always told him to pick up glass with a towel. The glass in his house isn't nearly as refined or expensive so he wonders if that means that crystal cuts cleaner? Billy brings Steve the biggest piece, holds it deftly and presents it to his master as if Steve really is a King. Steve holds his hand up, palm out and fingers spread.

"I can do it," Billy offers, voice something like a desperate pant.

Steve raises his eyebrows and smiles. "You want to?" Billy nods, tongue and teeth working at his lips. Steve takes the shard from him. He holds Billy's hand up so Dustin can see and he drags the sharp glass down his skin. Dustin winces— phantom pains stinging his own hand— but Billy doesn't flinch at all as the blood pools and then spills from his palm.

It's a deep cut, one that should have Billy buckling over, but he just sinks his teeth in deep to his bottom lip, eyelashes fluttering like he *likes* it or something.

Steve takes Billy's hand in his, holding it still as they all watch how the open wound slides and scurries to stitch itself back together, smooth gleaming skin filling in the holes where the gap used to be. Steve looks fondly at Billy's palm after, how the wet blood still drips down his unblemished skin. Steve grins, wicked and bright. Dustin hasn't seen Steve look that excited by anything before, that engaged. The air grows thicker, bespelled, and Dustin suddenly finds the whole thing too intimate, too weird, in a long long night of weird. Steve brings Billy's palm up to his lips, sucking it clean in long lazy licks, eyes locked on Billy's, Billy's locked back on his, absolutely besotted. And yeah, it's like they forgot Dustin was even here.

"Umm guys?" Dustin cuts in, because if he's going to die tonight, he is *not* going to let Steve Harrington drinking down Billy Hargrove's blood be the last thing he sees. Both sets of eyes turn to him and Dustin tries not to regret that.

"I guess you're not upset with him anymore?" Dustin, who wanted this night to be over so many times, feels he needs to buy time now. Keep them talking. They seem to love talking right? And the police will send back up if their guys don't come back from a call. Right?

But what would the cops even do against them? Bullets piercing skin that sews itself together in seconds. They could kill every cop in the tri-state area and they might even have a good time doing it.

“Hm,” Steve says, thoughtful, his eyes on Billy. “No. Not when he’s being so *good*.” Steve presses a kiss to Billy’s palm and then lets the hand drop. Steve’s attentions are on Dustin now, his hand reaching into his pocket for something. It washes over Dustin then— the true horrifying reality of the moment. This all means the Devil is real and Dustin wonders if he’s going to hell. Maybe he’s already there? Steve’s eyes are so bright with wicked amusement, maybe the Devil is in the room with them right now, maybe he never left. Or maybe it was his house and his party to begin with.

Steve pulls out the syringe, a similar one from before. “Don’t worry Dusty. You are so brave. You’re going to be OK. You’ll see tomorrow, this is all just a weird kind of dream. You’ll wake up and find that the rest of us just died in a fire— a true American tragedy, so very very sad. I’ll make sure you have a new pair of gloves though, ok? You can wear them to the funeral; keep up the trend.”

“What....?”

“You always were my favorite,” Steve winks at him, ruffling Dustin’s hair as he shoots him that million-dollar smile. The prick of the needle is unfortunately familiar, as is the dizzying grey rush that follows. The world begins to tilt. Steve helps Dustin lay back on the couch, tucking the warm wool blanket around him as the drugs pull him under.

The living room around him begins to fade as Billy comes up behind Steve, puts his hand on Steve’s shoulder. Steve twists towards him, takes the hand back into his again, the one that had moments before been sliced open, but was now clean and smooth, tinted and darkened from where it had been stained with blood.

Steve takes Billy’s palm back up to his lips, placing a single gentle kiss at its center, a saccharine contrast of emotion compared to any Dustin has seen from Steve tonight, maybe ever. Billy must be more used to it though, because he doesn’t look surprised, a little in awe maybe, but still wholly receptive to Steve’s actions.

Steve pulls Billy in, brings Billy's palm down to the middle of his chest, presses it over his pectoral muscle, just a bit to the left where Steve's heart would anatomically be, if that was something Steve still had, or has ever had. Dustin doesn't know now.

Billy just sighs, a curious sound Dustin doesn't really recognize before he melts against Steve, their lips locking together in a twisted embrace. It's *gross*—slow, lazy, and utterly erotic as the blood still on Steve's tongue melts over Billy's.

"*No one can ever hurt you again,*" Steve murmurs into Billy's mouth as Billy moans, whispers Steve's name back like a prayer.

It's the last thing he sees before Dustin's world goes dark.

**

When Dustin comes to, he's in the forest. The filter of light suggests the early morning, but it's too grey and overcast to tell. The wool blanket is still wrapped around him, tight and warm and it smells like fire, like ash. Dustin blinks and looks around. There's a tall crystal glass that matches the Harrington's whisky set full of orange juice on the dirt beside him, protected from bugs and the fallen leaves by a clean, crisp pair of dark brown leather gloves laying over the top of it. The very same pair of gloves that Steve had been wearing all week.

The glass is still cold.

Dustin scrambles out of the woods. He doesn't touch the juice, but brings the blanket with him, shoving Steve's gloves into the pocket of his pants. He makes it to the edge, where the forest turns into Steve's lawn.

The house is gone, its charred and blackened bones the only thing that remains— precariously perched and fragile against the wind. Steve's house is *gone*, its once great structure burned down enough to ash that Dustin can see the full spread of it, can see right through it to the rest of the grounds, and the empty quiet that remains.

Steve's gone too.

Notes for the Chapter:

The following do NOT survive part II of this chapter: Tommy, Carol + two random off-screen police officers. This all happens off-screen and is mentioned off-handedly. We're pretty sure not many people are incredibly broken up about this, but if you are, we're sorry.

8. Hell is Empty and All the Devils are in Hawkins

"Satanism advocates practicing a modified form of the Golden Rule. Our interpretation of this rule is: 'Do unto others as they do unto you'; because if you 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,' and they, in turn, treat you badly, it goes against human nature to continue to treat them with consideration. You should do unto others as you would have them do unto you, but if your courtesy is not returned, they should be treated with the wrath they deserve."— Anton Szandor LaVey

"Hope not ever to see Heaven. I have come to lead you to the other shore; into eternal darkness; into fire and into ice." — Dante Alighieri, Inferno

HELL IS EMPTY AND ALL THE DEVILS ARE IN HAWKINS

The Hawkins lab is a gray so dark it blends in with the night. Billy isn't sure how to get there, but Steve knows, and he follows Steve closely—will follow Steve anywhere. The point is that they do it all together: the ritual, the house, later Neil, but the lab first. Steve says because it's closer to his house, so it makes sense geographically to hit it first. But Billy thinks it's more about how long Steve has waited for it.

Billy knows how much this whole *ascension-and-retribution* thing means to Steve; he has, after all, listened to all the stories Steve has told him at night, whispered in the dark like some grim fairy tale-- The twisted kind with thorned hedges and birds that go straight for the eyes. The town, as Billy had come to learn, had been blind to the horror lurking within it for a very long time. Or maybe the people in it just didn't care as long as they didn't have to personally see it for themselves.

Only Steve *had* seen it. The things Steve had described that lurked in the forest had been horrible: machines and wires and children screaming. The sound lingered in the air, their screams piercing into the night. He could hear them growing up through his bedroom window, even when he shut it. His mother had told him the sound was just coyotes in the woods. But Steve had known better. He had seen that girl in the yellow dress who had sounded just like that, high pitched and distorted by the laboratory's tunneled walls.

The scent was worse, something sickly sweet in the air that lingered like the aftermath of rain. It wafted into the Harrington's backyard sometimes, and Billy will always remember the moment Steve had explained to him how the earth smelled like that whenever bodies burned. When an experiment failed.

Billy knew how much of a toll it had taken on Steve to grow up next to The Plant with no power to stop it. Despite the Devil's promise to show him the way, Steve had been forced to wait for it. And a part of Steve had died in the wait, erecting icy walls around the pieces that were forced to lay dormant in suspension.

Billy had always been able to sense that frozen part in Steve like an instinct. He had known the first moment they touched that Steve was different: hard, beautiful, and cold. It was the part of him that most people caught glimpses of and called "king."

But Billy had seen beyond that--had locked eyes on Steve in a parking lot his first day in Hawkins and felt the prickle of Steve's gaze shiver directly down his spine. One look and Billy had understood. He may not have known what Steve was, where that enigmatic power in him came from, or why, but still, Billy had understood. Because Billy *gets it*, down to his own frozen pond of a core—that feeling of being powerless against something bigger. Stronger. The fear and hatred that calcifies in the veins while awaiting the day that he could finally hit *back*.

That day for Steve had finally come. So, it wasn't a question: They had to hit the lab first, there was no other option, and Billy isn't the least bit surprised by how bright Steve's eyes shine in the moonlight when they reach the door to the structure that lay nestled and unassuming in the thicket of dying trees. That brightness in Steve is beautiful--it reminds Billy again just how much Steve has carried the dark history of this town in his mind for years, has let that spark a fire in him, and how he's ready to let it spread.

Hell fire is a cleansing: Billy would know.

Steve has a plan--has had one this whole time and they've followed it pretty closely. Following Steve isn't exactly a hardship, particularly down a dark path in the forest with them both smelling deliciously of

kerosene and smoke. But the lab is buried pretty deeply into the woods and the longer they travel in the dim light the more restless Billy becomes, that thirst for any kind of impact twitching under his skin as they reach the looming structure, dusty and grey as it is in the moonlight.

Steve breathes steadily beside him, but he hasn't said a word. Steve gets like that sometimes, sinking deep into his head like the silence will help him focus. It's more likely Steve had spent so much time alone in his house before Billy had moved to Hawkins that sometimes he forgets he can talk out loud. That there's someone there now who can hear and listen to him.

This is the part of the plan that Billy isn't great with. The parts that are quiet. Billy wants to break in, smash things, make noise, make a scene. Billy loves noise and wreckage. But it's Steve's plan, Steve is in charge, and Steve wants to walk through the front door.

The door in question is iron and innocuous, bolted to the frame of the old concrete structure in a garish mixture of rusted steel and stainless aluminum. Billy paused a few feet back from it to take it all in, unsure of whether he would have been able to sense the evil in this place if he hadn't been told. The dark power in the area is stale. Old. It's not the danger of yesterday's beer on Neil's breath or even the archaic thrum of the ritual that now swirls through his own veins. Whatever dwells in this part of the forest isn't any devil he knows. And that thought gives him pause, the adrenaline of the unknown mixing with the quiet night putting his body on edge.

Something that feels like bile taps dangerously at the back of his throat. He feels like a kid again, when the creak of boots on the floorboard outside his door at night, or the clank of a belt buckle piercing through the sound barrier of thick air was still new. Closets, below the bed, even the shadows beneath the pier, nothing had ever been dark enough to hide in.

Steve walks a few feet farther ahead of him before he suddenly halts. But Billy can tell even through the dim light that the motion is more patient than urgent, like he's stopping for the things behind him rather than whatever lies ahead. It's like he can sense that Billy isn't as close behind him as he should be. Maybe he can. Maybe now that

they're bound by blood and brimstone, they can feel each other in a way no other two humans can.

Steve looks back at Billy and smiles, utterly charming as he crooks a finger, beckoning Billy to him. Despite the current lock down of his muscles, Billy comes forward automatically, will always come when Steve calls--*must* come when he calls--because Steve has given him so many gifts and all Billy wants to do is give back. For Steve to know he's grateful, he's loyal, and all this before they've even gotten to the Hargrove homestead.

Billy blindly follows Steve's summons until he's right back beside him. He feels better already, Steve's presence shaking away the memories Billy would rather just completely forget. Steve's eyes are on him, quizzical and assessing. Billy shrugs him off but can't help bumping his hip against Steve's as he does so, seeking whatever small point of contact he can sneak in before they open the door. The new energy sparking under his skin is still raw. He knows that his body will adjust eventually, accepting the electric buzz as his new kind of normal, but it hasn't yet.

The sensation is almost disorienting, plucking at his nerves. But Steve is there, brimming with more energy and power than Billy could ever conceive of. It pulses off of him in waves. Billy pauses again, concentrating on the beat of it, and, sure enough…

"I can feel your heartbeat," Billy says, breaking the silence in a wondrous whisper, his voice pitched low in case the lab has ears.

Steve takes that statement in stride as he slides his hand to the back of Billy's neck, pulling him in close. The soft open swell of his mouth hovers, nearly touching Billy's, but Steve doesn't kiss him. He presses their foreheads together instead, eyes drifting closed, and plays with the hair at the nape of Billy's neck.

"Yeah," Steve says in return, and the response is too simple. Too accepting.

"No," Billy tries to explain. "I can *feel* it .*In me.*"

Steve works his way up Billy's jaw with a soft open mouth, barely

pressing down as he whispers along the bone, “Yeah, Hargrove. I’m in you now.”

Like that just explains everything. And maybe it does. Billy isn’t usually one to ask many questions and he isn’t all that inclined to start. Steve must know it too because he doesn’t offer any answers. Smooth teeth nip at Billy’s earlobe and Billy feels the smirk that suddenly spreads on Steve’s face as Steve adds in a more teasing tone, “I mean, you are always saying that you wish I could stay inside you forever.”

Billy groans, even if his stomach clenches in a pleasant jolt at the idea. “That was *one* time, and I was talking about your *jizz* in my *ass*.”

Steve huffs out a laugh at that. Genuine and delighted. “Fuck yeah, you were. You do say the sweetest things, baby.” Steve’s breath is back in his face, all nicotine and cinnamon mentos and Billy burns to inhale him completely.

Steve sobers again, the plane of his forehead back to rocking against Billy’s, dark eyes fixated on Billy’s mouth in return. “I’m with you,” he repeats, solid and serious. “I am you and you are me. Always.”

There’s nothing Billy can say to that. He just knows that Steve’s words are right. Everything is right.

Steve’s thumb skirts over the artery in Billy’s throat, tapping out the pulse below it like morse code, responds with a pleased hum at whatever message he finds there. Billy’s own fingers wrap into the open V of Steve’s jacket, reflexively gripping tight. He feels like a starlet from some old movie from the 40s. The whole world black and white, the two of them standing somewhere in between.

“Let’s show them some real darkness, sweetheart,” Steve purrs, the words ghosting onto Billy’s lips.

Billy lunges for a kiss. He can tell Steve wants one too from the way the ice in Steve’s core melts just a little as he folds in response against him, lips burning like flame, searing Billy’s very soul with the heat of it. For a drawn out beat it’s all Billy can think about. Nothing else

exists: not time, or space, just Steve.

Thinking isn't really his strong suit anyway. He doesn't like to think if he doesn't have to. And he doesn't have to with Steve. Even now, in the middle of the forest outside the reinforced steel doors of some creepy government laboratory, Billy just lets himself feel. The air is cold: Indiana in December. The snowfall from earlier in the week crunches beneath his feet. The stars hang dead but bright in the sky. Steve's breath fogs in the thin slip of air where his breath and Billy's collides. His lips taste like salvation.

The heat builds between them. Steve's fingers clench around the fabric of Billy's shirt, pulling him closer. Like he never wants to let Billy go.

Billy would willingly let Steve's heat swallow him whole. He's prepared to stay locked like this forever, but he's only allowed a few seconds before Steve pulls away, his breath rapid and quick, fogging up the air. The electricity of their connection still lingers on his tongue, Billy can feel it course through him—a thrum of vibrant energy. It sparkles in his bones. It feels eternal.

Steve moves forward into the night and there's no hesitation after that: Billy is beside Steve rather than behind him.

Steve reaches for the door handle. It's locked but it doesn't matter. The ferrous mixture of the door bends easily under Steve's hand, so much so that Billy couldn't call it ripped off its hinges so much as *bent*. The squeak of the metal breaks through the stillness of the entryway, giving way to a bare atrium with white walls, which look almost blue under the long strips of fluorescent lights.

Somewhere a clock is ticking, an old analog thing that clicks and echoes through the corridors that spin off the entryway on all sides. Even from the doorway, Billy can tell that the ground of each hallway angles downwards slightly, suggesting that the halls might actually be tunnels, burrowing deeper underground as they go. Billy's not sure how large the laboratory actually is: There is no way of knowing how deep the place goes below the earth. He doesn't think that Steve knows either. Or maybe he does. Steve seems to know a lot about things he shouldn't.

Billy doesn't really have time to think much more about it. There's a moment of stillness where nothing seems to happen and then everything around them implodes. The once empty atrium fills immediately with a flurry of men. Billy clocks six of them in total. Middle aged and deliberately non-descript upon first glance, they are each dressed in an innocuous array of business casual and yet they move like an army. A second glance reveals that they are also all armed with enough firepower tucked into their belts and shoulder holsters to even rival Neil's personal collection.

Steve knocks his shoulder against Billy's with a nod, the slightest smile playing at the corners of his otherwise impassive expression. And Billy has to admit then that despite his initial protests, it turns out that it's interesting enough simply opening a locked door and walking in casually, that Billy isn't sorry they didn't crash in with some kind of more deliberate, flashy spectacle.

The laboratory militia is dramatic enough as it is. The guards shout at them, wield their guns and say they need to leave. This is private property and they are sanctioned to shoot trespassers.

Their threats offer about as much hindrance as their bullets do: none. Steve walks through them with Billy at his side. Each wound closing up as soon as the metal passes through it. Billy would assume they'd change tactics, see that the guns have no lasting effect on the intruders and change plans. But they're little more than panicked animals, fingers clutching down on the triggers and hoping that their next bullet will be the one that works.

Steve presses forward, so Billy does too. No one would be able to tell by looking at the lab from the outside, but the whole place is a maze, hidden and twisted deep below the ground. It's a very different kind of underworld; but it's still familiar. Especially for Steve who had been through these walls before. But even Billy finds there's something too familiar in the sterile tile of the floors, scrubbed too clean and stinking of high-grade disinfectant. The stench of it cuts chemically through the blood, the bleach so thick on the air that it sticks in his throat. And even though he doesn't particularly want it to, Billy's mind keeps conjuring the words of his father on repeat—the mantra holy trinity of the Hargrove house: respect, responsibility, and *no hospitals*.

The men in this labyrinth prowl together like a well-honed colony. An endless parade of crisp shirts ironed to military precision, trim mustaches, and steel-toed shoes. Billy doesn't know what they look like to Steve, but all Billy can see is Neil.

The hive begins to swarm. Billy's old inclinations towards violence collide with new power and something instinctual inside him swells. The first man's skull crunches beneath his knuckles. It doesn't feel like vengeance or even absolution. It doesn't feel like anything other than a dull sensory rush. Stimulus. Action without consequence. It feels like a high.

The manic grin of the moment spreads on Billy's face as he watches Steve take his own man down. Steve looks less elated. He's more focused. But it's not his usual calculated type of focus, one that's studying all the angles. It's more like a sense memory, something hardwired in his muscles like a casual routine. Steve moves through the halls like the one lone pebble before an avalanche—a harbinger, a warning that if you were to look behind him all you'll see is inexplicable destruction in his wake.

He's methodical.

He's gorgeous.

Billy can't look away.

He takes a bullet to the sternum for his distraction. One of Neil's doppelgängers getting in a square shot. The momentum of it tears through him, punching him back a step.

Billy grunts. The feeling is familiar. Not the getting shot, per se, but the high-pressure sensation of a punch to the chest. Blood stains his shirt in small rivers and he grits his teeth as he feels his body push back, the muscles contracting and squeezing until the bullet is pushed out, the scorched metal falling with a bouncing ping onto the concrete.

The follow-up feeling of his skin stretching to stitch itself back together is one Billy isn't sure he'll ever get used to. It's a tickle, a tingle, a breath on the back of his neck. An exquisite little torture

that makes his dick stiffen up faster than anything ever has before.

He's always been a masochist but never like this. It has to be the pact. Steve's promise to never let pain reach him again elevated to a whole next level or something. It's fucking fantastic is what it is. He wonders what it would feel like to have Harrington play with him like this—slicing shallow cuts into his skin over and over so that Billy can feel the electric burn until his whole body is buzzing. Steve, fucking beautiful sadist that he is, wouldn't stop until Billy was begging to come. And probably not even then.

Billy licks his lips, already buzzing with the phantom ache, the tender feel of fresh skin over his chest cavity. His heart.

He's so distracted by it that the Not-Neil gets two more shots into him before Billy feels the snap of the man's vertebrae beneath his palms, his own skin once more pushing out metal and scurrying to close. He moans and the sound echoes. Steve looks up with a sharp glance his way, honed into the sound of Billy in pleasure and distress.

Billy is under no disillusion. He's always been a fuck-up—he knows that those two conditions always sound the same spilling from his throat.

Steve's eyes lock on his. They glitter in the low light. Billy watches Steve watch him, watches Steve wrench another guard to the ground without even breaking his eye contact with Billy. Watches Steve bring his hand--the hand that had just taken down a full grown and armed man like it was *nothing*—up to his lips to lick a droplet of blood from his own thumb and swallow. Billy moans again: pleasure and distress. Steve smiles. Steve knows. He knows what Billy wants just like Billy knows he'll have to wait for it.

They have work to do.

Billy looks down at the man in his hands, still gurgling out an unattractive tune from his throat. The sound is too familiar, reminds him too much of late nights of muscles cramped and contorted on the living room floor, his body unable to stand up from the ground, free-bleeding into the carpet, and knowing it would still be his job to clean up the stains.

Billy scowls at him. He's never snapped a neck before, not a human one, and he'd always wanted to try it. It's harder than it looks.

He tries again, wrenching his hand one way while twisting with the other. It takes practice and he only manages to do it correctly after several attempts. Once he has the motion down, however, knows the pressure to use and what direction is best, he snaps so many necks he loses count.

Billy snaps until it is muscle memory, and then gets bored with doing it that way and pulls out a serrated blade. He doesn't want to use a gun. He knows where Neil keeps all of his and the combinations, so he could if he wanted to, but he *doesn't* because guns are too quick and you can't feel the kill with them. A gun is too distancing, there's no connection between cause and effect. But a knife is personal, intimate, and most importantly, bloody. Billy has had so much blood on him this night and he's going to have even more. He and Steve will drench themselves in it and let it soak into them until they feel satisfied.

Billy can't help but watch as Steve makes his own kills. Steve loves knives, and Billy knows first-hand that Steve's an artist with a blade. But Billy also knows that Steve loves nothing more than the slow concave pressure of his hands around someone's neck. Steve says it's the intimacy of using only his hands to take someone apart—to hold their life, literally, in his hands.

The laboratory has been *personal* to Steve for such a long time that it's of little surprise that Steve opts for his hands now, taking his time as the skin beneath his palms flushes red to blue. The breath-taking artistry is as thrilling as it is a little disappointing; Steve will have less blood on him by the end of the night. And something tells Billy that Steve Harrington bathed in blood would be a glorious sight to behold. But then again, by the end of the night, they'll be clinging so closely to each other that Billy's body will rub off on Steve. One way or another Billy will make sure they're painted red.

By the time they massacre their way to the lowest level they've run out of brave idiots to mow down. It's all cowering scientists and Billy lets Steve have them. Steve is the one who has earned it, waiting as long as he has. And Billy is satisfied by the crunch of wood as much

as bone, so he occupies himself with kicking open doors and dragging out anyone who is hiding instead.

This is how he finds the little girl, maybe about Max's age, crouched in a padded room.

It's white, it's small, and it has very little in it besides the girl and the bed she's on. The kid's head is shaved. Billy notices because Neil had done the same thing to him once, when he was around the same age the girl is now. Billy had cried for a week after, the feel of the divots and planes of his exposed skull somehow more disorienting than any beating.

Billy had believed everything Steve had said about the darkness lurking inside these walls. The callous apathy for children's souls. The endless tests and pain. Billy had believed it, but it was something else to see it cowering in front of him. It reminded him of his own bedroom: the austere cell, void of most personal objects, even a child cowering, crying in the dark.

"Harrington," Billy calls out. Steve doesn't answer immediately but there's a sound of metal tearing into flesh followed by Steve's echoing footsteps as he approaches.

"What is it?"

"You're better with kids," Billy says, gesturing to the girl. Steve smiles when he sees her, and stepping into the room, he puts his hands up and crouches low, making himself smaller to pacify her.

"It's all right," he says in a voice he usually saves for Dustin, "You scared?" Steve moves with slow precision, radiating a calm kindness. He's a good babysitter. Billy might hate kids, but Steve doesn't, and even this strange pipsqueak of a kid can see that. The girl nods. "What's your name?" She shakes her head. "Okay. That's okay. You want to go?" She looks between Steve and Billy, unsure. Steve nods back, always the encouraging type. "Yeah you do. Go ahead." Billy steps out of the doorway and Steve offers a nod his way too. "No one to stop you," Steve informs her.

She's tentative getting off the bed, eyeing the bloody stains that

splash down the front of Billy's shirt. Billy offers the girl a shrug. There's nothing he can do about the blood and it seems inappropriate to just take his shirt off in front of her. This is his second shirt of the night, after all.

The girl is strange. She looks at him, and it's faint, but Billy can almost detect the same coldness in her that he had in Steve. She's younger than them, hasn't had enough time to fully freeze over, but Billy still gets the sense that she's sizing them up like she's warring between fight and flight. After a few seconds, the kid decides on the latter. She moves slowly, more so when passing by Steve and through the doorway. But once she's in the hall she's off like a shot, down the hall and up the stairs.

Billy's eyes linger on the trail the girl took. Steve was right. There was no one left in the building to stop her from leaving, but Billy also knows that the world can still be cruel outside these walls. He hopes she's smart enough not to just go running into another new and different prison. But he thinks of the girl's eyes and the cold there, gained from years of being held in the dark. It's the kind of gaze that is older than the kid looks. And some part of Billy--the part of him that had recognized the same broken pieces in her—knows she's the kind of kid who will fight to survive. She might even succeed at it if she finds her own kind of angels to help her like he had Steve.

But then again, there's no one else out there like Steve.

"Poor kid," Steve murmurs as an afterthought, eyes scanning the room and landing on the knife Billy had dropped to the cell floor as the only thing he could think of to do to seem less threatening.

Steve picks the knife back up for him, blade shining and limp at his side as he comes to stand next to Billy and nuzzles into his hair, taking a deep inhale. The woosh of air slips over Billy's spine in waves until his whole body tingles and he closes his eyes, leans back into it. He forgets about the strange little girl entirely then. Forgets about anything other than the slight pressure of Steve at his back, the flat of the blade near his thigh.

"You have any idea how good you smell?" Steve asks softly. "You smell like smoke and blood." Steve kisses him, the soft spot just

under Billy's earlobe and Billy thanks him in a moan. Those wide lips of his break into a smile; Billy can feel the split of it on his skin. Billy moans again and that smile grows wider. Billy's so distracted by it that it takes him a second to register how Steve's warm palms have moved from Billy's hips to the top of his thighs. But the moment he does, Billy lets his body spread open further, setting his legs apart to give Steve room to touch whatever he wants to.

"Let's finish up here," Steve sighs like he's disappointed the job was over so soon, wicked fingers still stroking just shy of too lightly over the bulge in Billy's jeans, the blade in his right hand angled to minimize the threat of digging in too far. "One last stop before dawn, killer. I did promise, after all."

Neil. Billy trembles at the thought with a mixture of gratitude and fear, his body only stilling when he presses back into Steve's. Steve is giving him another gift: removing the last bit of his own evils from the face of the earth.

Billy's knuckles are still hot with blood. He closes his eyes and imagines the blood is Neil's, hones onto the bruise above his kidneys from two nights prior after Neil had caught him smoking inside the house—the damage set so deep that the dark magic in his veins still hasn't yet fully healed it. That dull ache fuels him. Makes him wonder what Neil's body would look like molted that same purple hue. His jeans feel suddenly tighter.

The sound that escapes Billy at the thought is heady, higher pitched than normal. It's the retribution, the violence, the freedom. The idea of being free excites him. And Steve's hand is warm.

A dark chuckle skitters over him, slipped from Steve's lips to cascade over Billy's skin. "You like that, don't you?" Steve asks. It's rhetorical, but Billy nods anyway. "Yeah, you do. You're all worked up."

Steve kisses the base of his ear again as he presses the front of himself against Billy's back, his other hand dropping the blade back to the floor, spread palms framing the outline of Billy's cock in his jeans. His hands cup the front of Billy's quads, using the hold to pull Billy back against him. Denim scrapes against denim as Billy's ass slots right up against Steve's hips, his upper legs, his dick. Even

through all the layers, Billy can feel Steve—how hard he is. Billy groans, breath hitching as Steve croons low in his ear.

“Rub your ass against me. Come on, Billy, work me good.”

Billy does so without question. The drag of the constrained length behind him, the hard edge of the zipper, it digs into the back seam of his own pants just right, but there isn’t enough pressure. The sensitivity of the friction is somehow both dulled and heightened.

Steve’s dick rests long and heavy against his leg; he has always been a king. It’s fat and thick even through both of their jeans. Finding the angle is pure instinct for Billy at this point, only taking a slight adjustment and twerk of his hips for the crown of Steve’s cock to slip further down the seam of Billy’s covered ass, between the back of his thighs, where it rubs and pushes against his taint, the base of his balls. It’s a delirious kind of pleasure. A tease. A catch in his throat on the verge of wild laughter. A spark he needs to catch fire but *won’t*.

Billy’s breath grows ragged as he grinds, working his ass and hips back at a frantically increasing pace. Steve continues to aid him with the palmed hold on Billy’s quads. His deceptively subtle but steel grip keeps Billy anchored from going too far forward, but otherwise Steve lets him struggle with it for a while, watching.

With his back pressed against Steve, Billy can’t see Steve’s face. The distance in that makes everything just a little bit more degrading, humiliating—to be so frenzied in rubbing his clothed ass all over Steve while Steve stands stoically, observing. That humiliation burns in his veins; it makes everything sweeter.

But Billy knew he was truly done for the moment Steve starts talking, beginning with how earnest and gone he sounds himself as he whispers, “Fuck, Billy, you have no idea what you do to me.”

Billy begins to nod, because he has some idea; It is, after all, what he feels right back. But Steve isn’t done, his voice dark and sweet.

“The moment I saw you roll into town, I knew you were special. I could tell how strong you were. How much you would fight to

survive. You were so beautiful. So *angry*. Tommy and Carol were with me that day. They could read it on me—how much I wanted you. Tommy was the one that said you'd never go for it. That even *King Steve* wouldn't stand a chance of getting a guy like you. Taming a guy like you. A guy so wild and always demanding control…"

The story is one Billy has heard before, but it remains one of his favorites. The idea that Steve had clocked him right away, those indifferent-seeming eyes scanning the lot and that out of his full pick of the school, they had landed on Billy. That Steve had seen something in him too and never looked away.

Steve's voice remains conversational and low, his stance still tall and unyielding, thumbs teasing in slow circles as he grips the juncture of Billy's pelvis tighter, helps guide him forward and back.

Steve likes to play it casual sometimes, a game to see if Billy can get the ice to crack.

Steve tilts his torso forward, chin resting over Billy's shoulder until his mouth is murmuring against the side of Billy's jawline, the corner of his lip.

"Carol thought I stood a chance. She was always a bitch, but she was also always much more observant than Tommy ever was. More shrewd. I think she could see a little bit of what I could on you. How the fight in you was what made you so *good*."

Billy nods, acknowledging the truth in the observation. That Steve had been right. Billy had always had a weakness for pretty men--had always felt that ache in him every time one smiled his way, eyes scanning and then lingering too long until Billy could no longer resist the building heat and he'd break, lips curling into a knowing smile, his head bobbing on a nod, giving the signal he had practiced in front of the mirror until it felt ingrained: a tilt of his neck, a jerk in the tendons that said, *hell yeah, come with me*.

They would come and so would Billy. But never like he had with Steve. Because Steve was right. Billy demanded control, always. Not because he wanted it, but because he couldn't afford not to have it.

Things were different with Steve. Steve took care of the things that mattered to him. Steve had offered him true salvation. An *escape*. Billy's never felt so free, so seen and *safe*. And he would certainly, eagerly, bow or bend over for Steve anywhere in a heartbeat. Wished he could do so right in this moment, in the basement of some creepy clandestine lab full of the fresh minted corpses of Steve Harrington's calculated wrath. Billy still smells of their blood. He's slick with it. It's sick. It's perfect.

Steve's left hand creeps steadily but slowly upwards as he speaks, rubbing and cupping Billy's dick through his jeans. Billy rarely ever wears underwear and the direct contact of the denim stings, his fly heavy and sharp against his skin, the little gaps in the metal teeth digging in as Billy thrusts up into the offered pressure of Steve's palm. The sensation of it zips through him. Billy bites his tongue and Steve groans like he can feel it on his own.

Steve uses the cup of his hold to pull Billy back towards him, to keep his own dick tight against the cradle of Billy's ass as he finally begins to move his own hips into the grind. The sensation of the rolling pressure is the only kind of heaven Billy needs. His entire body shudders.

"Fuck I wanted you." That's never been a secret, but Steve breathes it soft like a confession. "I wanted you more than anything. Still want you more than anything."

Billy whimpers and Steve hums. Billy could be embarrassed, but he isn't. He knows Steve craves him like this—the desperation—and so Billy allows him to see it.

"They placed bets on it. Did you know that?"

That part of the story is new. Well, sort of. Billy has always known about the bet on him, but Steve has never admitted to it. But he says it now. No trace of regret in his voice. Like he knows that Billy hearing about Steve's former lackies placing bets on his ass and how easy it was would hit Billy just right.

Sure enough, Steve smiles something wicked, hooking his chin further over Billy's shoulder as he licks a wet stripe up Billy's cheek.

The pant of Steve's breath grows heavier, the tale of the memory riling him up, too.

"They threw money down on whether you would bend over for me. How easy you'd be. I knew you had it in you to take it. Just one look at your ass and I knew it'd feel like paradise. And it did. But I never even told Tommy or Carol when I won. Fuck, I wanted to. Wanted to brag to the whole town how all it took was a nod and a *look*. Wanted everyone at school to know how you shuddered when I bottomed out inside you. How it punched this sound out of you like you never really knew just how deep a dick could go. I wanted to tell everyone, but I didn't even have to. The way you came up to me at school the next day, the look in your eyes. Tommy didn't say a thing either, just silently handed Carol a 20."

Billy doesn't say anything to that other than to moan. He doesn't have to. He had known about the bet or had worked it out. The whole school had known of King Steve's games, and Steve had never kept them a secret either. Steve had liked the added challenge of people knowing it might all be a game and scoring anyway. It wasn't Steve's fault if others lost sight of that fact and started to think they were special. And it wasn't Billy's fault that he got wild and hard off the idea that he had turned out to be the only one who actually was.

But Steve liked to play games. Everyone knew. It hadn't taken a genius to figure out he had started as one too. All that mattered is that they both had won.

"I know you clocked that," Steve confirmed, like he could read Billy's mind. He couldn't, at least Billy didn't think that Steve could. But the rest of him had never been hard for Steve to read, so it didn't really matter. "You saw them exchanging the cash right in the open in front of you. I thought you'd be mad. That you'd throw a fit, start some kind of fight. But you knew what it was, and you *smiled*. Fuck, Billy, you *winked* at them both before you kissed me like you had proven and won something too. That was the moment I knew you were going to be mine. Knew you wanted to be and didn't care who knew it. Knew I was yours, too."

The grind of Steve's hips pick up with his own. A fevered pitch. Billy's fingers curled into loose fists before scrambling against the

sides of Steve's legs to curl into the muscles there. Holding on. Billy felt close, pushed to the edge. It shouldn't be even close to enough stimulation, but then again, the whole night was stimulation, working Billy up to the precipice of release on sheer adrenaline and awe.

"Yeah," Billy manages to choke out, his voice sounded raw even though his throat has been tragically empty all evening. "I knew," he confirmed, "Told Tommy later that my ass was worth at least triple what he'd bet, but that you had fucked me so deep and good that I would always take it for free."

Steve's breath comes out as a wine. "Fuck, Billy. What did he say?"

Billy loves it when Steve gets demanding like that—*greedy*—cool restraint clinging by a thread. Billy feels the ebb of power between them, feels the creeping balance of control slide over his way.

"He called me your whore."

Steve's fingers flex at that, digging in.

"I told him he was right; I was." Billy really had. He can still remember it clearly--the way that Tommy had sneered at him in the locker room, his sharp little eyes slit and focused in on the marks around his hips, the bruising on his neck. '*He fucked you,'* Tommy had scowled, *'you let him fuck you,'* and *'Never took you for a whore, Hargrove.'*.

Any other day, Billy would have laid Tommy out, cracked his skull and maybe a few vertebrae against the lockers. But instead, Billy had just felt calm in the face of an accusation which had struck him then as something deliriously and utterly *true*. He had pushed Tommy up against those lockers instead, smile wide as he made it clear, *'Only for him.'*

"Asked him then if he was jealous that he was no longer your right-hand man," Billy offered, his focus hazy under the pressure of Steve's hand, the jolts of pleasure spreading through him. "I could tell that he was. That he worshipped you like everyone else at that school, but he never would have been able to give you what you needed. Not in

the way you like it. Some guys just don't have it in them. But even if he could have grown the balls to let you sink into him deep enough to bottom out against yours, he never would of. I made sure of that. Told him if he ever even looked at you, I'd kill him."

"You did that anyway." Steve's voice is light, teasing. He doesn't sound particularly broken up about it.

"You kissed him." Billy knows his own voice sounds petulant, but his words are true. Tommy was never a *cocksucker*. He's never had it in him, and Billy has always been happy about that. Tommy always took up enough of Steve's time without trying to get on his dick. The idea of Tommy's lips on Steve's still stings though, sets his blood to a low simmer.

Steve rolls his eyes and then his hips, punctuating. "You dared me to."

Billy considers that idly and shrugs. The jealousy that had raged up in him earlier in the living room at watching Steve's lips hover over Tommy's ebbing a bit more into a dull ping, like the fading memory of a dream. "I did, didn't I." Billy goes in for the kill, craning his neck to mouth at Steve's chin. Knows Steve will appreciate the unrepentant apathy in the coy way he says, "oops."

Steve groans low and comes, hips jerking violently, fingers digging in, pulling Billy back and in. The wet warmth of it spreads. In reality, it probably stays contained by Steve's pants, but Billy can swear he feels it anyway, gasps at the phantom sensation along with the very real sensation of Steve's body surrendering to pleasure.

Steve's pleasure triggers Billy's own. He can feel himself tipping, chasing the fall. Steve feels it too. He slots his leg between both of Billy's to give Billy something to grind against as he nuzzles into the crook of Billy's neck, sinks his teeth deep into the tendon and bites down *hard*. The jolt to his system is all he needs, the sweet spike of pain lacing through him from Steve's incisors to his skin.

Billy buckles as he shudders, knows Steve will hold him up. He comes the way he always does, with a hoarse scream that sounds like Steve's name catching in his throat, forced into an oversensitive completion

as Steve pushes his hand past the waistband of Billy's jeans, jerking his wrist slowly around him in the aftermath as Billy quivers.

Billy flinches; he whimpers. He's in love.

Steve gropes at Billy's cock, smearing his palm around the head and gathering what he can before pulling it out. Billy tilts his head back onto Steve's shoulder, heat coiling through him as he watches Steve bring his hand up to his own lips to suck at his palm, licking every part of Billy up with a satisfied moan.

Steve's face is like the stars: pale, ethereal. He carries his own light. Billy tries to look upon him with all the reverence that deserves. Billy will never understand, but will always be grateful for, the way Steve looks at him right back. Like he knows his very soul. And maybe he does. Billy had given it to him, after all.

That concept—what that means for 'his soul' or even Steve's—is a little too beyond him, cosmically speaking. Steve had tried to explain it to Billy before, but Billy doesn't really care. Not about his soul or anybody else's. Especially if the deal meant he got to watch Steve Harrington smirk as he licked cum off his fingers for all eternity, or whatever.

Steve turns Billy all the way around, presses his forehead to Billy's in the way that Steve likes to do. Sharing breath. "Feel better?"

Billy nods. He had already been feeling pretty good before but he feels great now, so he supposes that classifies as "better."

"Was tonight good?" Billy asks, and he's more quiet than usual, standing there in the cold basement of the laboratory, Steve's white whale now slain. It seems too easy, like maybe the buildup wouldn't be worth the pay off.

"It's not over yet," Steve replies, and Billy knows that, but still.

"Was it good though?" *Was I*, Billy wants to ask, but can't. He doesn't know why, but it's just not the same if he asks.

Steve gets it, though. He always does. "You were perfect." It's not an automatic response. He thinks it through. His face is soft. He means

it. And Billy feels a sense of calm wash over him.

The calm settles in his bones as Billy waits for Steve to clean himself up with a pillowcase he had pulled off the cot in the room, smirking at Steve's scowl over the low quality thread count.

"Everything alright there, Harrington?" Billy couldn't help but poke.

"*Polyester*," Steve practically whined as if that explained everything, and Billy had spent enough time around Steve that it sadly did. "It's downright *inhuman*." Steve glowered down at the crumpled wad in his hand and Billy laughed, the sound echoing down the emptied hall.

The image of Steve striding steady and calm through a hailstorm of gunfire was still vivid in Billy's mind— will likely be an image that will always be there. It's a fitting one for Steve, embodies everything Billy knows Steve to be: so much stronger than he looks; persistently unyielding; devilishly disarming; and so fucking hot. Well, it's *almost* everything Steve is. The other part—the part that grimaces like a piece of him is suffering a slow agonizing death at the thought of his skin touching a polymer blend—is a part that Billy appreciates just as fiercely. Because that was Steve—a breathtaking, gorgeous, high maintenance enigma.

"I'm pretty sure you'll survive."

Steve rolls his eyes as he tosses the makeshift rag to the floor, but there's that undeniable quirk on his lips that Billy adores. "Fine," Steve relents, but Billy's pretty sure he hasn't heard the end of it. "Come on, killer," Steve continues as he begins to steer them towards the door, hands sinking into Billy's front pockets and dropping kisses on the slopes of his shoulders as they go. "I have a promise to keep."

Neil's name remains unspoken. It doesn't need to be said. That too, after all, is now part of Steve's plan. And if he follows Steve's plan, Neil's name might never need to be spoken again.

Notes for the Chapter:

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